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THE

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SERMONS

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SERMON I.

THE HAPPINESS OF A HEAVENLY CONVERSATION.

PHILIPPIANS III. 20.

For our converſation is in heaven.

THE word which is here tranſlated "converſation," may either ſignify the privilege of citizens, or their converſation and manners, or may take in both theſe. In the former ſenſe, the words may properly be rendered, "our citizenſhip is in heaven;" an alluſion

perhaps to thoſe, who, though they were not born at Rome, and it may be lived at a great diſtance from it, had yet the privilege of Roman citizens. In like manner the Apoſtle here deſcribes the condition of Chriſtians. It is true, we are born here in this world and live in it, but we belong to another ſtate; we are denizens of another country, and free of that city which is above. In the other ſenſe of the converſation of citizens we find the word uſed towards the beginning of this Epiſtle, "Let your converſation be as it becometh the goſpel of Chriſt." And why may not the phraſe in the text, without any inconvenience include both theſe? as if the Apoſtle had ſaid; there are ſome that mind earthly things, and are ſo addicted to them, that rather than part with them they will forſake their religion; but as for us, we conſider that we are citizens of heaven, and accordingly converſe and demean ourſelves in this world as thoſe that are free of another world and belong to it.

So that to have "our converſation in heaven," implies theſe two things; the ſerious thought and conſideration of heaven;

heaven; and the effect which thoſe thoughts ought to have upon our lives.

Concerning the heavenly world there are two things which principally offer themſelves to our conſideration; the happineſs of this ſtate; and the way and means whereby we may come to partake of this happineſs.

Firſt; Let us conſider the happineſs of this ſtate. But what, and how great this happineſs is, I am not able to repreſent to you. Theſe things are yet in a great meaſure within the veil, and it does not now fully "appear what we ſhall be." The ſcriptures, however, have revealed ſo much in general concerning the reality and unſpeakable felicities of this ſtate, as may ſatisfy us for the preſent, and ſerve to inflame our deſires after it, and to quicken our endeavours for the obtaining of it: they inſtruct us, that it is incomparably beyond any happineſs of this world; that it is very great; and that it is eternal; in a word, that it is far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine.

It is incomparably beyond any happineſs in this world. It is free from all thoſe ſharp and bitter ingredients which

abate and allay the felicities of this life. All the enjoyments of this world are mixed, uncertain, and unſatisfying; nay ſo far are they from giving us ſatisfaction, that the very ſweeteſt of them are ſatiating and cloying.

None of the comforts of this life are pure and unmixed. There is ſomething of vanity mingled with all our earthly enjoyments, and that cauſeth "vexation of ſpirit." There is no ſenſual pleaſure which is not either purchaſed by ſome pain, or attended with it, or ends in it. A great eſtate is neither to be got without care, nor kept without fear, nor loſt without trouble. Dignity and greatneſs is troubleſome almoſt to all mankind; it is commonly uneaſy to thoſe that have it, and it is uſually hated and envied by thoſe that have it not. Knowledge is one of the beſt and ſweeteſt pleaſures of human life; and yet if we may believe the experience of one who had as great a ſhare of it as any of the ſons of men ever had, he will tell us, that "this alſo is "vexation of ſpirit; for in much wiſdom "there is much grief, and he that in-"creaſeth knowledge, increaſeth ſorrow."

Thus

Thus it is with all the things of this world; the beſt of them have a mixture of good and evil, of joy and ſorrow in them: but the happineſs of the next life is free from allay and mixture. In the deſcription of the new Jeruſalem it is ſaid, that "there ſhall be no more curſe, and there ſhall be no night there;" nothing to imbitter our bleſſings, or obſcure our glory. Heaven is the proper region of happineſs, there only are pure joys and an unmingled felicity.

But the enjoyments of this world as they are mixed, ſo they are uncertain. So wavering and inconſtant are they, that we can have no ſecurity of them; when we think ourſelves to have the faſteſt hold of them, they ſlip out of our hands we know not how. For this reaſon Solomon very elegantly calls them things "that are not." "Why wilt thou "ſet thine eyes upon that which is not? "for riches certainly make to themſelves "wings and fly like an eagle towards "heaven." So fugitive are they, that after all our endeavours to ſecure them, they may break looſe from us, and in an inſtant vaniſh out of our ſight; "riches "make to themſelves wings, and fly

" like an eagle." He that enjoys the greateſt happineſs of this world, ſtill wants one happineſs more, to ſecure to him for the future what he poſſeſſes for the preſent. But the happineſs of heaven is a ſteady and conſtant light, fixed and unchangeable as the fountain from whence it ſprings, " the Father of lights, " with whom is no variableneſs nor ſha- " dow of turning."

And if the enjoyments of this life were certain, yet they are unſatisfying. This is the " vanity of vanities," that every thing in this world can trouble us, but nothing can give us ſatisfaction. I know not how it is, but either we, or the things of this world, or both, are ſo fantaſtical, that we can neither be well with theſe things, nor well without them. If we be hungry, we are in pain; and if we eat to the full, we are uneaſy. If we be poor, we think ourſelves miſerable; and when we come to be rich, we commonly are ſo in reality. If we are in a low condition, we fret and murmur; and if we be raiſed to greatneſs, we are frequently farther from contentment than we were before. So that we purſue the happineſs of this world juſt as little children

dren chaſe birds; when we think we are come very near it and have it almoſt in our hands, it flies farther from us than it was at firſt.

Nay ſo far are the enjoyments of this world from affording us ſatisfaction, that the ſweeteſt of them are moſt apt to ſatiate and cloy us. All the pleaſures of this world are ſo contrived as to yield us very little happineſs. If they go off quickly, they ſignify nothing; and if they ſtay long, we are ſick of them. But the delights of the other world, as they will give us full ſatisfaction, ſo we ſhall never be weary of them. Every repetition of them will be accompanied with new enjoyment. In the felicities of heaven theſe two things ſhall be reconciled, which never met together in any ſenſual delight; long and full enjoyment, and yet a freſh and perpetual pleaſure. As "in God's preſence there is fulneſs of joy," ſo "at his right hand there ſhall be pleaſures for evermore."

Further; The happineſs of the other life is not only incomparably beyond any happineſs of this world, but it is very great in itſelf. The happineſs of heaven is uſually in ſcripture deſcribed

to us by ſuch pleaſures as are manly and excellent, chaſte and intellectual, infinitely more pure and refined than thoſe of ſenſe; and if the ſcriptures at any time deſcend to the metaphors of a feaſt, a banquet, and a marriage, it is plainly by way of accommodation to our weakneſs, and condeſcenſion to our capacities.

The chief ingredients of this happineſs, ſo far as the ſcriptures have thought fit to reveal it to us, are the perfection of our knowledge, and the height of our love, and the perpetual ſociety and friendſhip of all the bleſſed inhabitants of thoſe glorious manſions; and the joyful concurrence of all theſe in chearful expreſſions of gratitude, in the inceſſant praiſes and admiration of the Fountain and Author of all this happineſs. And what can be more delightful than to have our underſtandings entertained with a clear ſight of the beſt and moſt perfect Being, with the knowledge of all his works, and of the wiſe deſigns of his providence? than to live in the reviving preſence of God, and to be continually attending upon Him whoſe favour is life, and

and whoſe glory is much more above that of any of the princes of this world, than the greateſt of them is above the meaneſt worm? The Queen of Sheba thought Solomon's ſervants happy in having the opportunity of ſtanding continually before him to hear his wiſdom; but in the other world it ſhall be a happineſs to Solomon himſelf, and to the wiſeſt and greateſt perſons that ever were in this world, to ſtand before this great King, to admire his wiſdom, and to behold his glory. Not that I imagine the happineſs of heaven to conſiſt in an idle contemplation of the Divine glories; for the ſcripture tells us we ſhall be transformed into the image of the Divine perfections; "we ſhall ſee God, and we ſhall be like him:" and what greater happineſs can there be than to be like the happieſt and moſt perfect Being in the world? Beſides, who can tell what employment God may have for us in the next life? We need not doubt but that he who is happineſs itſelf, and hath promiſed to make us happy, can eaſily find out ſuch employments and delights for us in the other world, as will be proper and ſuitable to that ſtate.

Beſides the improvement of our knowledge, there ſhall be the moſt delightful exerciſe of love. When we come to heaven we ſhall enter into the ſociety of the bleſſed Angels, and of "the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect," that is, freed from all thoſe paſſions and infirmities which now render the converſation even of the beſt men ſometimes troubleſome to one another. We ſhall then meet with all thoſe excellent perſons, thoſe brave minds, thoſe innocent and charitable ſouls, whom we have ſeen, and heard, and read of in this world. There we ſhall meet with many of our dear relations and intimate friends; and perhaps with many of our enemies, to whom we ſhall then be perfectly reconciled, notwithſtanding all the warm conteſts and peeviſh indifferences which we had with them in this world, even about matters of religion. For heaven is a ſtate of perfect love and friendſhip, where there will be nothing but kindneſs and good nature. And what greater happineſs can be imagined, than to converſe freely with ſo many excellent perſons, without any thing of folly or diſguiſe, of jealouſy or deſign upon one another? For then there

there will be none of thoſe vices and paſſions of covetouſneſs and ambition, of envy and hatred, of wrath and peeviſhneſs, which now ſo much ſpoil the pleaſure, and diſturb the quiet of mankind. All quarrels and contentions, ſchiſms and diviſions, will then be effectually hindered, not by force, but by love; not by compulſion, but by that "charity which never faileth:" and all thoſe controverſies in religion which are now ſo warmly agitated, will then be finally determined, not as we endeavour to end them now, by canons and decrees, but by a perfect knowledge and convincing light.

And when this bleſſed ſociety is met together, and thus united by love, they ſhall all join in gratitude to their great Patrons and Benefactors, "to him that "ſits upon the throne, and to the Lamb "that was ſlain, to God even our Fa-"ther, and to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, "who hath loved us and waſhed us from "our ſins in his own blood." And they ſhall ſing everlaſting ſongs of praiſe to God for all his works of wonder, for the effects of that infinite goodneſs, admirable wiſdom, and almighty power, which

are clearly ſeen in the creation and government of the world, and of all the creatures in it; particularly for his favours to mankind, for the benefit of their beings, for the comfort of their lives, and for all his merciful providences towards them in this world: but above all, for the redemption of their ſouls by the death of his Son, for the free forgiveneſs of their ſins, for the gracious aſſiſtance of his holy Spirit, and for conducting them ſafely through all the ſnares and dangers, the troubles and temptations of this world, to the ſecure poſſeſſion of endleſs glory and happineſs. Such ſhall be the employment of the bleſſed ſpirits above, and theſe are the chief ingredients of our happineſs which the ſcripture mentions.

Again; This happineſs ſhall be eternal. And though this be but a circumſtance, and enters not into the nature of our happineſs, yet it is ſo material a one, that all the felicities which heaven affords would be imperfect without it. It would ſtrangely damp and allay all our joys, to think that they ſhould ſometime have an end. And the geater our happineſs were, the greater trouble it would

would be to us to conſider that it muſt have a period.

It would make a man ſorrowful indeed to think of leaving ſuch vaſt poſſeſſions. Indeed if the happineſs of heaven were ſuch as the joys of the world are, it were fit they ſhould be as ſhort; for after a little enjoyment it would cloy us, and we ſhould ſoon grow weary of it. But being ſo excellent, it would ſcarce be a happineſs if it were not eternal. It would imbitter the pleaſures of heaven, as great as they are, to ſee an end of them, though it were at ever ſo great a diſtance; to conſider that all this vaſt treaſure of happineſs would one day be exhauſted, and that after ſo many years were paſt, we ſhould be as poor and miſerable again as we were once in this world. God hath ſo ordered things, that the vain and empty delights of this world ſhould be temporary and tranſient, but that the great and ſubſtantial pleaſures of the other world ſhould be as laſting as they are excellent.

Laſtly; This happineſs is far above any thing that we can now conceive or imagine. It is ſo great, that it cannot now "enter into the heart of man." We cannot

cannot from the experience of any of thoſe pleaſures and delights which we have been acquainted with in this world, frame an equal idea and conception of it. So that when we come to heaven, we ſhall be ready to ſay of it as the Queen of Sheba did of Solomon's wiſdom and proſperity, that "half of it hath not been told us;" that the felicities and glories of that ſtate far exceed all the fame which we heard of them in this world. For who can ſay how great a good God is; and how happy he who is the fountain of happineſs can make thoſe ſouls that love him, and thoſe whom he loves?

The ſecond thing to be conſidered concerning our future happineſs, is, the way and means whereby we may come to be made partakers of it. And that in ſhort is by the conſtant and ſincere endeavours of a holy life, through the mercies of God in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Chriſt indeed is the Author of our ſalvation, but obedience is the condition of it; ſo the Apoſtle tells us, that Chriſt "is "the Author of eternal ſalvation to them "that obey him." It is "the grace of God" in the goſpel "which brings" or offers

offers this "ſalvation" to us; but then it is by the "denying of ungodlineſs and worldly luſts," and by "living ſoberly, "and righteouſly and godly in this pre- "ſent world," that we are "to wait for the bleſſed hope." Our Saviour promiſes this happineſs to the "pure in heart," "Bleſſed are the pure in heart, for they ſhall ſee God;" and elſewhere the ſcripture excludes all others from any ſhare or portion in this bleſſedneſs: ſo the Apoſtle aſſures us, that "without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord."

Holineſs is not only a condition, but a neceſſary qualification for the happineſs of the next life. This is the force of St. John's reaſoning, "We ſhall be like him, for we ſhall ſee him." To "ſee God" is to be happy, but unleſs we be like him we cannot ſee him. The ſight and preſence of God himſelf would be no happineſs to that man who is not like God in the temper and diſpoſition of his mind. And from hence the Apoſtle infers in the next verſe, "Every man "that hath this hope in him purifieth "himſelf even as He is pure." So that if we live wicked lives, if we allow ourſelves in the practice of any known ſin,

we

we interrupt our hopes of heaven, and render ourſelves unfit for eternal life.

This life is the time of preparation for our future ſtate. Our ſouls will continue for ever what we make them in this world. Such a temper and diſpoſition of mind as a man carries with him out of this life, he ſhall retain in the next. It is true indeed, heaven perfects thoſe holy and virtuous diſpoſitions which are begun here; but the other world alters no man as to his main eſtate, "he that is filthy will be filthy ſtill," and "he that is unrighteous will be unrighteous ſtill." If we do not in a good degree mortify our luſts and paſſions here, death will not kill them for us, but we ſhall carry them with us into the other world. And if God ſhould admit us ſo qualified into the place of happineſs, yet we ſhould bring that along with us which would infallibly hinder us from being happy. To be happy, is to enjoy what we deſire, and to live with thoſe whom we love. But there is nothing in heaven ſuitable to the deſires and appetites of a wicked man. All the joys of that place, and delights of that ſtate, are purely ſpiritual, and are only to be reliſhed by

thoſe

thoſe who have "purified themſelves as God is pure." Heaven is too pure an air for corrupt ſouls to live and breathe in; and the whole employment and converſation of that place, as it would be unſuitable, ſo would it alſo be unacceptable to a ſenſual and vicious man.

From all this it appears how neceſſary it is for us to prepare ourſelves for this bleſſed ſtate, by the conſtant and ſincere endeavours of a holy life, and by mortifying every luſt and inordinate paſſion in our ſouls. For till this be done, we are not meet to be made partakers of the felicities of the other world.

The "having our converſation in heaven," implies likewiſe the effects which thoſe conſiderations ought to have upon our hearts and lives. And they are ſuch as theſe:

Firſt, to convince us of the vanity of this world. God hath purpoſely made this world troubleſome and uneaſy to us, that there might be no ſufficient temptation to reaſonable and conſiderate men to take them off from the care and thought of their future happineſs; that God and heaven might have no rival here below; that

that there might be nothing in this world that might pretend to our affection, or court us with any advantage in compariſon of everlaſting life and glory.

The hope of heaven ſhould make us active and induſtrious to be as good, and to do as much good as we can in this life, that ſo we may be qualified and diſpoſed for the happineſs of the next. Men are uſually very induſtrious for the things of this life, to be rich and great in this world: did we but value heaven half as much as it deſerves, we ſhould take infinitely more pains for that. As often as we conſider the glories that are above, how does it accuſe our ſloth and condemn our folly that we are leſs concerned for our ſouls than moſt men are for their bodies, that we will not labour half ſo much for an eternal inheritance, as men ordinarily do for theſe corruptible things?

The conſideration of heaven, and the firm perſuaſion of our future happineſs, ſhould actuate all the powers of our ſouls, and be continually inſpiring us with new vigour in the ways of holineſs and virtue. How ſhould this thought ſwell our reſolutions, and confirm our purpoſes of obedience, that if we have our

our "fruit unto holineſs," our "end will be everlaſting life?"

It ſhould alſo mitigate and lighten the evils and afflictions of this life. It is no great matter how rough the way be, provided we be ſure that it leads to happineſs. The incomparably greater good of the next life will to a wiſe and conſiderate man weigh down all the evils of this. And the ſcripture tells us that there is no compariſon between them. "The "ſufferings of this preſent time are not "worthy to be compared with the glory "which ſhall be revealed in us." The evils of this life afflict men more or leſs, according as the ſoul is fortified with conſiderations proper to ſupport us under them. When we conſider that we have but a little while to ſtay here, that we are upon our journey travelling towards our heavenly country, where we ſhall meet with all the delights we can deſire; it ought not to trouble us much to endure ſtorms and foul ways, and to want many of thoſe accommodations we might expect at home. This is the common fate of travellers, and we muſt take things as we find them, and not expect to have every thing juſt to our mind.

Theſe

Theſe difficulties and inconveniences will ſoon be over, and after a few days will be quite forgotten, and be to us as if they had never been. And when we are ſafely landed in our own country, with what pleaſure ſhall we look back upon thoſe rough and boiſterous ſeas which we have eſcaped!

Again, this expectation ſhould make us ſincere in all our profeſſions, words and actions. Did men firmly believe the rewards of another world their religion would not be only in ſhew and pretence, but in life and reality, no man would put on a form of godlineſs that were deſtitute of the power of it; we ſhould do nothing for the opinion of others, but all with regard to God and our own conſciences; and be as careful of our thoughts, and moſt retired actions, as if we were in an open theatre, and in the preſence of the greateſt aſſembly. For in the next life men ſhall not be rewarded for what they ſeemed to be, but for what they really were in this world. Therefore whatever we think, or ſpeak, or do, we ſhould always remember that the day of revelation is coming, when the ſecrets of all hearts ſhall be diſcloſed, when all diſguiſes ſhall be laid aſide, and every one's

one's maſk ſhall be taken off, and all our actions and deſigns ſhall be brought upon the public ſtage, and expoſed to the view of men and angels. "There is nothing "now hidden which ſhall not then be "revealed, nor ſecret which ſhall not "then be made known."

Laſtly, the hope of heaven ſhould arm us againſt the fears of death. Death is terrible to nature, and the terror of it is infinitely increaſed by the fearful apprehenſions of what may follow it. But the hope of a bleſſed immortality ſurpriſingly relieves the fainting ſpirits of dying men, and are able to reconcile us to death, and in a great meaſure to take away the terror of it. I know that the thoughts of death are diſmal even to good men, and we have never more need of comfort and encouragement than when we are conflicting with this laſt enemy: but there is no ſuch comfortable conſideration to a dying man as the hopes of a happy eternity. He that looks upon death only as a paſſage to glory, may welcome the meſſengers of it, as bringing him the beſt and moſt joyful news that ever came to him.

With

With what joy then ſhould we think of thoſe "great and glorious things which "God hath prepared for them that love "him; of that inheritance incorruptible, "undefiled, which fadeth not away, re- "ſerved for us in the heavens!" How ſhould we welcome the thoughts of that happy hour when we ſhall make our eſcape out of theſe priſons; when we ſhall be removed from all the troubles and temptations of a wicked and ill natured world; when we ſhall be paſt all ſtorms, and ſecured from all further danger of ſhipwreck, and ſhall be ſafely landed in the regions of bliſs and immortality!

O bleſſed time! "When all tears "ſhall be wiped from our eyes, and "death and ſorrow ſhall be no more; "when mortality ſhall be ſwallowed up "of life," and we ſhall enter upon the poſſeſſion of all that happineſs and glory which God hath promiſed, and our faith hath believed, and our hopes have raiſed us to the expectation of; when we ſhall be eaſed of all our pains, and reſolved of all our doubts, be purged from all our ſins, freed from all our fears, and be happy beyond all our hopes; and have all

all this happineſs ſecured to us beyond the power of time and change: when we ſhall know God and other things without uncertainty, and love him and one another without meaſure; ſerve and praiſe him without wearineſs, and obey his will without reluctance; and ſhall ſtill be more and more delighted in knowing, loving, praiſing, and obeying God to all eternity.

How ſhould theſe thoughts affect our hearts, and what a mighty influence ought they to have upon our lives! The great diſadvantage of the arguments brought from another world, is, that theſe things are at a great diſtance from us, and not ſenſible to us; and therefore are not likely to affect us ſo ſtrongly, and to work ſo powerfully upon us. Now to make amends for this diſadvantage, we ſhould often revive theſe conſiderations upon our minds, and inculcate upon ourſelves the reality and certainty of theſe things, together with the infinite weight and importance of them. We ſhould reaſon thus with ourſelves: If good men ſhall be ſo unſpeakably happy, and conſequently wicked men ſo extremely miſerable in another world: if theſe things be true,

true, and will one day be found to be ſo, why ſhould they not be to me as if they were already preſent? It is as certain that we ſhall die, as if an expreſs meſſenger ſhould come to every one of us from the other world and tell us ſo. Why ſhould we not then always live as thoſe that muſt die, and as thoſe that hope to be happy after death? To have theſe apprehenſions vigorous and lively upon our minds, is to "have our converſation "in heaven, from whence alſo we look "for a Saviour, the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, "who ſhall change our vile body that it "may be faſhioned like unto his glorious "body, according to the working of that "mighty power whereby he is able even "to ſubdue all things to himſelf."

SER-

SERMON II.

THE NATURE, REASONABLENESS, AND ADVANTAGES OF PRAYER.

MATTHEW xxvi. 41.

Pray, that ye enter not into temptation.

WHEN we consider that our blessed Saviour has commanded us to pray, directed us in what manner we ought to pray, and set us an example of frequent prayer in his own practice; it

muſt appear ſurpriſing, that any who pretend to be his followers, ſhould indulge themſelves in a determin'd contempt, or careleſs neglect, of this important duty. But ſurpriſing as it is, a little acquaintance with what paſſes in the world, puts it beyond all doubt, that the expreſs precepts, and conſpicuous example, of the great inſtructor of mankind, with regard to prayer, are treated ſlightly, nay even contemptuouſly, by ſome of thoſe who call themſelves his diſciples. To what cauſes can ſuch ſtrange inconſiſtency betwixt the profeſſion and practice of chriſtians be aſcribed? There may be many and various cauſes of it, according to the different turns of men's tempers, and purſuits in life. But as it would detain us too long, to enumerate them all; let it ſuffice at preſent, to take notice of that, which every one who has reflected on what paſſes in the world in his own time, or has looked into the hiſtory of former ages, muſt have obſerved; namely, that the beſt things may fall into diſrepute, and conſequently into diſuſe, for no other reaſon, but becauſe they have been abuſed by the weak or the artful and deſigning part of mankind.

kind. Thus prayer, an excellent thing in itſelf, and a noble mean of improving our ſouls in every thing virtuous and praiſe-worthy, is ſunk into contempt among one part of the world, from this accidental circumſtance, that weak and well-meaning people have ſometimes ſullied its native beauty, by a mixture of low ſuperſtition; or, becauſe worldly and deſigning men have perverted it to ſerve their wicked purpoſes.

In diſcourſing therefore on this ſubject, it is hoped it may not be unuſeful, to endeavour, in the firſt place, to explain the nature of prayer; and to ſet it in its true light, by ſtripping it of all foreign and ſuperfluous circumſtances: and then to point out the advantages which ariſe from the ſincere and ſtedfaſt practice of it.

Before we enter upon the conſideration of theſe heads, it is proper to obſerve, that prayer is to be underſtood in a reſtrained ſenſe in this diſcourſe; as ſignifying chiefly that part of devotion commonly called petition; as diſtinguiſhed from adoration and thankſgiving, which are frequently comprehended in the meaning of the word prayer.

In order to underſtand the nature of prayer, let us take notice that the inward acts of mind and heart exerted in it, from which the outward expreſſions ſhould flow, and by which they ſhould be animated, are principally theſe three following.

Firſt; A lively and intimate perſuaſion that we are utterly inſufficient for our own happineſs; and that we depend entirely upon our Maker for all we poſſeſs here, or hope to enjoy hereafter. That we are in a dependent and indigent, a dark and uncertain ſtate of being, is obvious on the firſt reflection: we diſcern, we feel in ourſelves many marks of our dependence, our indigence, and ignorance. We find ourſelves poſſeſſed of an exiſtence which, if we only regard this preſent life, is confined within very narrow bounds, and extends only to a very ſhort period. We ſee all creatures about us continually diſappearing, after having acted their part but a few years on this ſtage: and we cannot avoid expecting the ſame fate ourſelves; that we muſt ſoon withdraw into darkneſs, and make room for others: as we came into

into being without our own choice or conſent, at the pleaſure of another; ſo we muſt depart out of this ſtate of being, at the command of him who ſent us into it: and even while we are allowed to continue here, we can neither procure for ourſelves all the good things we want and deſire, nor ſecure the poſſeſſion of what we already enjoy: we feel manifold wants which we cannot ſupply: we groan under manifold imperfections and infirmities which we cannot remove; we are liable to innumerable dangers, many of which we do not foreſee; and from others, even when we do ſee them approaching us, we cannot defend ourſelves. We are conſcious that we are not only in ſome inſtances weak and helpleſs; but very ignorant and uncertain of many things which nearly concern us. We know not what ſhall befal us in our paſſage thro' this life; nor at what time, in what manner, or circumſtances, we ſhall make our exit from it into another: neither know we what our ſtate or employment ſhall be in thoſe other regions, into which we muſt

enter when we depart from this world. But the moſt lamentable and mortifying ignorance is ſtill behind, namely, ignorance of our duty, or the great rule of life; ignorance of our true happineſs, and the way that leads unto it. Tho' we have ſome general knowledge of our duty, from the light of reaſon and revelation; yet we find that we are not only in danger of erring, but frequently do err in applying general rules to particular inſtances of our conduct: daily experience convinces us, that a regard to worldly intereſts, and the ſtrength of irregular appetites and paſſions, greatly darken our underſtandings, and occaſion ſuch falſe judgments concerning our behaviour, as neceſſarily leads us aſtray from the path of life: and ſurely, we have great reaſon to dread the conſequences of a departure from the law of righteouſneſs, under the government of the righteous judge of all the earth. In like manner, though we have ſome general and ſpeculative knowledge concerning our true happineſs, or chief good; yet our own experience, as well as obſervation of the world, may convince us, that our views of it are not ſo clear and

ſtriking

ſtriking as, at all tims, to prevent our purſuing falſe appearances of it: for alas! how frequently, how fatally are we diſappointed; finding thoſe things vain and unſatisfactory, in which our fond imagination had promiſed us happineſs? We have no ſecurity in ourſelves, that we ſhall not be guilty of the ſame transgreſſions of the law of virtue, and the ſame departures from the path of happineſs, in the ſucceeding ſtages of our lives, than we have been, in the former ones. Now, every man who has ſeriouſly conſidered how wretched and helpleſs he is in himſelf, will find the neceſſity of flying out of himſelf, and of taking refuge in Him who made him, and upholds him in being. Which leads us to the

Second act of the ſoul exerted in prayer, namely, the lifting it up with the utmoſt ardor, to that greateſt and beſt of beings, who brought us into life, and aſſigned us our ſtation in it; entreating him to teach us what part we ſhould act; to diſpel all that darkneſs of underſtanding, which is ſo apt to miſlead us from the right path; to forgive our ſins and follies; to deliver us from

the fatal conſequences of all our errors; to preſerve us from relapſing into them; and to guide us ſafely to ſome proper manſions of reſt, of light, and joy, beyond the grave. Every one who has imprinted on his mind a juſt ſenſe of his ignorance, weakneſs, guilt, and danger, will find an inward neceſſity conſtraining him to have recourſe in fervent prayer, to the great Author of his being, to conduct him ſafely through this ſtage of his exiſtence; to continue his providential care, in guiding him through the valley and ſhadow of death; to ſettle him at laſt in ſome happier place of abode.

The third act of mind exerted in prayer, is a firm belief, and aſſured truſt, in that God to whom we pray, and on whom we depend, that he will not only always do what is beſt, what tends to the greateſt good of the whole ſyſtem of intelligent beings; but that he will, ſooner or later, bring every one who ſincerely ſeeks wiſdom from him, to the poſſeſſion of perfect virtue and everlaſting happineſs. Without this confidence in the infinite mercy of the great Father of all, there would be no foundation for prayer, nor encouragement

encouragement to the practice of it. When we enquire into the doctrine of divine revelation on this head, we find lively and unshaken acts of trust in God are by it represented as equally necessary and essential parts of prayer, with either of those already mentioned. "He that "cometh to God must believe that he is, "and that he is a rewarder of them who "diligently seek him." "If any of you "lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, "that giveth to all men liberally, and "upbraideth not; and it shall be given "him. But let him ask in faith, no-"thing wavering, for he that wavereth "is like a wave of the sea, driven with "the wind and tossed." There are numberless joyful declarations to the same purpose, in the books of the Old Testament: such as, "the Lord is nigh "to all them that call upon him in truth: "he will fulfil the desire of them that "fear him; he also will hear their cry, "and will save them." Our blessed Saviour hath expressly renewed and confirmed all those delightful promises. "Ask "(says he,) and it shall be given; seek, "and ye shall find; knock, and it shall "be opened unto you: for every one

" that aſketh receiveth; and he that ſeek-
" eth findeth; and to him that knock-
" eth, it ſhall be opened: or, what man
" is there of you, whom if his ſon aſk
" bread, will he give him a ſtone; or if
" he aſk a fiſh, will he give him a ſer-
" pent? if ye then being evil, know
" how to give good gifts unto your
" children, how much more ſhall your
" Father which is in heaven give good
" things to them who aſk him?" And theſe particular and poſitive declarations of the will of God, are perfectly conſonant to the dictates of reaſon, by which we are encouraged to hope that it always has been, is at preſent, and will for ever be, the great, the ſtanding, the invariable law of the divine government, to beſtow wiſdom, virtue, and happineſs, upon all thoſe who aſk them with unfeigned ſincerity of heart; even tho' they never heard of theſe comfortable promiſes on which our ſouls reſt ſecurely; for it is very obſervable, that theſe joyful aſſurances from the great Father of all, that he will be found of thoſe who ſeek him, are expreſs'd in ſuch general terms, as to exclude no one, of whatever nation or country.

Before

Before we conclude this head of the diſcourſe, let it be remarked, in order to prevent miſtakes, that when it is ſaid, "God will accompliſh the deſires of thoſe who ſeek him;" this muſt always be underſtood of thoſe who ſeek him with real ſincerity and humility of ſoul, (virtues indiſpenſably required in the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt;) and who in a conſtant dependence on the divine aſſiſtance, exert their utmoſt endeavours to do whatever they can diſcern to be the will of God. Further, this doctrine of the certainty of obtaining our requeſts, muſt only be underſtood of what is neceſſary for enlightening and aſſiſting us in the paths of virtue; and ſhould by no means be extended to a thouſand other things, which we may deſire to know or poſſeſs, though they have no inſeparable connection with our virtue or happineſs. We may be apt to wiſh, with the greateſt fondneſs, for uninterrupted health, eaſe, and pleaſure, through our whole lives: but in theſe things, we muſt not hope to be gratified. We muſt learn to leave the all-wiſe diſpoſer of every event, to lead us to happineſs, in whatever path he pleaſes; whether it be the hard and rug-

ged one of adverſity and affliction, or the more ſoft and ſmooth one of proſperity and joy. And laſtly, let us carefully remember, that there is no ground to expect, that even our beſt and moſt pious deſires are to be accompliſhed, all at once, and in an inſtant: we muſt wait with patience, till God ſhall finiſh his own work, by the various methods of his providence and grace: it is with the works of God within us, as with the works of nature without us: they are not completed all at once, and in an inſtant: they require time, and are brought to perfection by ſlow and inſenſible degrees. A child muſt have time to become a man. The tree which is but juſt now planted, muſt have time to grow up to its full maturity, and bring forth fruit. In like manner, the progreſs of the ſoul towards perfection in virtue, is by ſlow advances: bad habits muſt be gradually weakened and overcome; and good diſpoſitions muſt be raiſed to their proper height, by an almoſt imperceptible increaſe. In a word, though we may be aſſured that our heavenly Father will bring us to perfection in glory and happineſs, at laſt; yet it is only

only by the ſlow and almoſt indiſcernible ſteps of his Providence and grace, that we muſt be ripened for it.

Now, from this view of prayer, it appears, that there is a foundation laid for it, in the nature and circumſtances of mankind, as dependent, ignorant, weak and guilty creatures; and in theſe manifeſtations their Creator hath given them of his glorious perfections, as employed for their ſafety and welfare. And from what has been ſaid of the inward acts of mind and heart exerted in prayer, we may infer, that every well-diſpoſed perſon (who will be at the pains to conſider things impartially, and to diſtinguiſh betwixt pure prayer itſelf, and thoſe odd and fooliſh things, which may ſometimes mingle with it) muſt ſee, that it is a thing highly reaſonable; that it is unavoidable to thoſe who allow themſelves to think ſeriouſly; that it is fit, and becoming, in the preſent ſtate and circumſtances of mankind; and that it has a natural tendency to beget and promote all thoſe amiable and important diſpoſitions of mind, which render men happy in themſelves, uſeful in this world, or fit for another. And in the third place, this explication

plication of the nature of prayer may furniſh us with proper anſwers to the objections againſt it, commonly inſiſted on by thoſe whoſe minds are under the power of prejudices. But this leads us

To conſider, more particularly the advantages which ariſe from the ſincere and ſtedfaſt performance of this important duty. And here,

In the firſt place, when we take the moſt general view of prayer, we cannot help diſcerning the uſefulneſs and importance of it. When we conſider that mankind, in their preſent ſtate, are deeply immerſed in the buſineſs or enjoyments of the world; that external objects are perpetually ſtriking upon their ſenſes, playing before their imaginations and making impreſſions upon their hearts; it evidently appears to be an unſpeakable advantage to them, to have regular and ſtated ſeaſons, of recalling their minds from the numberleſs avocations of a vain world, and fixing them upon God, and ſpiritual things. The ſureſt method of counterworking the impreſſions made on the ſoul by that crowd of worldly thoughts which paſs thro' it, is to baniſh them entirely for ſome time, and lay it open by

prayer

prayer and contemplation, to the impreſſions of thoſe heavenly and eternal objects, which by their greatneſs, importance, and excellence will engage and command attention. And indeed, without proper ſeaſons allotted to retirement and devotion, and frequently recurring, we are in the greateſt danger imaginable of being under the full and uncontrolled power of theſe vain and periſhing objects which ſurround us in the world; and which are perpetually engaging the attention of our minds, and ſolliciting the love and affection of our hearts. Our Saviour, in the words of the text, takes notice of this, as one great advantage of prayer, that it is a preſervative againſt the temptations of the world. "Pray, (ſays he,) that ye enter not into temptation." Now, prayer has a natural tendency, in a great variety of ways, to break the force of thoſe temptations to which we are neceſſarily expoſed in life. It keeps alive in our minds an habitual ſenſe of our danger; diſpoſes us to keep a watchful eye on thoſe things from which our danger ariſes; and puts us in a proper poſture for reſiſtance and defence. It turns away our attention (as has juſt now been obſerved,)

ed,) from thoſe objects which raiſe impure deſires and guilty paſſions in our boſoms. It calls up ſuch a lively ſenſe of the divine preſence, as muſt check the firſt riſing of irregular inclinations; and fill us with dread and ſhame, of thinking, ſaying, or doing any thing unworthy of thoſe who aim at the approbation and favour of the great Judge of all. It preſents the divine perfections to our view, and inſpires us with an abhorrence of every thing that would render us unlike to them. Whenever therefore we are aſſaulted with a temptation to gratify any impure and violent appetite, or paſſion, let us accuſtom ourſelves to ſtop, till we have lifted up our hearts to God, in ſincere and fervent prayer, that he may aſſiſt us in the conflict, and give us the victory; and we ſhall ſoon feel the violence of the temptation abated; that we are enabled to exert a hidden ſtrength, and for the preſent, to obtain an intire maſtery over it.

And as prayer fortifies us againſt temptations to ſin: ſo it inſpires us with the love, and animates us to the practice of every virtue. By offering up our moſt earneſt deſires to God, that he may more

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and more beautify our ſouls with all worthy and good diſpoſitions, our love to them is increaſed; and we are the more diſpoſed to employ every proper mean of eſtabliſhing and ſtrengthening them in our hearts. When we pray that the venerable image of our Maker may be ſtamped upon us, the divine perfections are neceſſarily preſented to our view, and contemplation; our love and admiration of them is heightened, and we are fired with the noble ambition of drawing nearer and nearer to them, by greater degrees of reſemblance. When we contemplate the deformity and miſery of vice, under the actual ſenſe of the preſence of God, and intreat him to preſerve us from it, we cannot but look upon it with the higheſt indignation, and form the moſt ſtedfaſt reſolutions to abandon it. When we view the beauty of holineſs, as our Creator's glory, and lift up our ſouls to him in ardent prayers, to adorn us with it, we muſt feel our hearts warmed with the love of it, and lay ourſelves under the ſtrongeſt vows of adhering uniformly and invariably to it, through the whole courſe of our lives. When we give full vent to the ardent breathings of our ſouls after

after the love of God, gratitude to him, and confidence in him; theſe pious affections are immediately awakened, and ſtrengthened in ſome degree in our hearts: and when we indulge ourſelves in frequent and ardent prayers for the proſperity and welfare of our fellow-creatures, this exerciſe of the kind and benevolent affections contributes greatly to enliven and invigorate them: moreover, thoſe views in which prayer preſents our brethren of mankind to our minds, tend greatly to ſoften our hearts and heighten our good-will and tenderneſs for them: when we conſider them as a part of the ſame great family of God, with ourſelves; as partakers of the ſame nature, as liable to all the ſame dangers and diſtreſſes, as groaning under the ſame darkneſs of underſtanding, diſorder of heart, and violence of paſſion; it will be impoſſible for us not to love and pity them with the greateſt tenderneſs, and pray with the utmoſt ardor, that they may be at laſt eſtabliſhed in ſome better and happier ſtate.

Further; Prayer puts us into the beſt frame and ſituation of mind for receiving the influences of heavenly light and grace.

It

It promotes a certain ſoftneſs and tenderneſs of heart, which renders the ſoul eaſily ſuſceptible of the impreſſions of ſpiritual and divine objects: the ſoul, when duly ſoftened and humbled by prayer, feels and ſees in quite another manner than when it is hardened and puft up with pride and vanity. A deep ſenſe of our ignorance diſpoſes us to attend to, and follow every ray of light, how ſmall ſoever; whereas, pride of underſtanding ſhuts out the light, and turns away the attention from it. We ſhould therefore conſider prayer, and exerciſe ourſelves in it, as the great means appointed by God for drawing down that wiſdom from above, which is neceſſary to guide us to our higher country, and to ſettle us in eternal reſt and happineſs, in our Father's houſe.

True devotion likewiſe raiſes the human ſoul to an uncommon pitch of grandeur and elevation. The mind of man ſeems to adapt itſelf to the different nature of the objects with which it is converſant: it is contracted and debaſed, by being employed in little and low things; and it is proportionably enlarged and exalted by the contemplation of thoſe things which

which are great and ſublime. The perfections of the Deity, his univerſal and eternal Providence, the excellence of virtue, and of thoſe general laws of God which are the foundation and ſupport of the order, the beauty, and happineſs of his whole rational kingdom; the dignity and immortality of the human ſoul, whereby it is capable of vaſt and endleſs improvements; theſe are objects of ſuch a ſtriking and exalted nature, that they muſt ennoble and enlarge the mind employed in contemplating them. All worldly and tranſitory things muſt appear unworthy the love and purſuit of that ſoul, which is raiſed above all created things, and which aſpires to, and purſues that happineſs, which ariſes from the love, the reſemblance, and enjoyment of the great Creator of all. There is no greatneſs of mind equal to that which ſprings from the divine ambition of aiming at a reſemblance of God; and from the glorious hope of ſeeing him as he is, in ſome future period of exiſtence. "Now are we the ſons of God, but it "doth not yet appear what we ſhall be; "but we know that when he ſhall ap-

"pear,

" pear, we ſhall be like him, for we " ſhall ſee him as he is.

Laſtly; True devotion gives a wonderful ſtrength, and firmneſs, to the ſoul which is under the full power and influence of it. That man muſt adhere with inviolable conſtancy to whatever is great or good in life, who is animated with the hope of the divine approbation, and who relies with aſſured confidence, on the friendſhip, protection, and aſſiſtance of the great Ruler of all things. No difficulties, no dangers can terrify him, who has that great being on his ſide, who is alone the ſovereign diſpoſer of all events. No temptations of pleaſure or profit can allure him who truſts in an almighty friend, who is able to make him happy in ten thouſand methods beyond what he can conceive. Every worldly thing vaniſhes at the preſence of him, " before whom the world is as nothing, leſs than nothing and vanity." Even death itſelf is ſtript of all its terrors, to the pious man; when it is conſidered only as a removing that veil of fleſh, which interpoſes betwixt him and the inviſible world. Nay, death itſelf is deſireable; as it diſcloſes new ſcenes of wonder and delight; and

and admits the devout ſoul to the more immediate preſence of its God, " where there are rivers of pleaſures for evermore."

Since then prayer is a reaſonable thing in itſelf; ſince there are ſo many, and ſo great advantages ariſing from the ſincere and ſtedfaſt practice of it; it muſt be both our duty and our intereſt to continue inſtant in it. And that we may be animated with fervor and ſincerity in the exerciſe of this part of our duty, let us frequently inculcate on ourſelves, that we are weak, indigent, and ignorant creatures; and that we depend entirely on our Maker, for all we poſſeſs at preſent, or hope to enjoy hereafter. The firſt and moſt obvious reflection convinces us, that we are nothing of ourſelves; but that it is by the power of God we have our exiſtence: no man was ever ſo preſumptuous and abſurd, as to imagine or aſſert that he was author and original to himſelf; or that he felt a mighty power within, by which when brought into being, he could continue himſelf in it as long as he pleaſed. Every one acknowledges that he finds nothing in his own nature to warrant his ſubſiſtence in this world, for one moment; and far

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leſs to enſure it for ever in another. Nay, even ſuppoſing our exiſtence continued to us by that all-mighty Being, who gave it, we are conſcious that we cannot conduct ourſelves ſurely to that ſtate of perfection and happineſs, which our natures are capable of, and for which they were deſigned. When we have viewed ourſelves on all ſides, we find we are in the moſt forlorn and helpleſs condition imaginable, without the friendſhip of a ſuperior and almighty Being. In order to repreſent our deplorable ſtate without a firm reliance on the all-ſuſtaining and all-conducting Providence of our great Creator, let us ſuppoſe, that, in a morning, when we awake, we ſhould find ourſelves ſailing along, with all our neareſt relations and deareſt friends, in a wide unconſtant and ſeemingly boundleſs ocean; where we ſee ſtorms and tempeſts gathering around us, hovering over, and very ſoon to break upon us; being utterly uncapable ourſelves to ſteer our veſſel to any ſafe harbour, and without any hope of aſſiſtance, either from men or inviſible powers; ſo that we could expect no relief, but muſt be in perpetual dread of being toſſed up and down at the pleaſure of winds and waves, till we ſhould be

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ſtarved to death, or, until our veſſel ſplit upon ſome unſeen rock, and we ſhould ſink to the bottom. Would not our caſe be extremely lamentable? Yet this is but a faint image of our ſtate here in this world, without an aſſured truſt in the wiſdom and goodneſs of an inviſible and almighty friend, who will lead us ſafely thro' this dangerous voyage of human life, and land us at laſt on ſome peaceful ſhore.

We find ourſelves placed here in a wide, and to our view a boundleſs world, and in the midſt of an incomprehenſible ſcheme of things: we know not whence we came, or whither we are going: we behold an eternity before us; but know not what ſhall befall us, while we continue here, at our departure hence, or in any period of that endleſs duration through which we may paſs. We ſee other perſons around us, of the ſame nature, and in the ſame circumſtances with ourſelves: they are as ignorant and as weak as we are; and can give us neither information nor aſſiſtance. When we reflect on what paſſes within our boſoms, we muſt own, that our inward tranquillity is frequently diſturbed and

and interrupted. Sometimes, indeed, pleaſing deſires, joyful hopes, and delightful affections, enliven and gladden our hearts: but, at other times, vain deſires, alarming fears, and guilty paſſions, diſquiet and torment them. It is not in our power, to preſerve uniformly the gentle emotions, and happy effects of the former; or to baniſh intirely the unquiet workings and baneful influences of the latter. When we look back on that part of our life which is already paſt, we cannot avoid being ſelf-condemned for many inſtances of ſin and folly; which ſometimes awaken within us dire forebodings of a juſt puniſhment, awaiting us in ſome future period of our exiſtence: and, when we look forward to that part of life which lies before us, we find reaſon to dread we ſhall be guilty of the ſame, or the like departures from the paths of wiſdom and righteouſneſs. Let any one retire from the noiſe and hurry of the world, and reflect ſeriouſly with himſelf upon his preſent ſtate, as a ſtate of trial, in which there is a certain path marked out to him by the great Author of his being; and that according as he walks in it, or departs from it, he

ſhall be happy or miſerable in this, and in another life: and after he has imprinted on his mind a juſt and awful ſenſe of this intereſting and important truth, that his eternal happineſs depends upon his behaviour; let him further conſider, that, through the weakneſs of his underſtanding, the ſtrength of his paſſions, the fickleneſs of his beſt reſolutions, and the numberleſs temptations of the world, he may be led aſtray from the path of life; and he will find himſelf ſtruck with ſuch a ſenſe of his danger, as will lead him to addreſs his Maker in ſome ſuch language as this:

O Father of lights, open mine eyes to ſee what my true happineſs is; point out the road clearly that leads unto it; and never ſuffer me to depart from it. Send forth thy light and thy truth, let them lead me and bring me to that new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs: guide me with thy counſel while here, and afterwards receive me to glory!

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SERMON III.

THE OBJECTIONS AGAINST PRAYER ANSWERED.

JOB XXI. 15.

What profit ſhould we have if we pray unto him?

THESE words will naturally lead us to examine the objections which have been uſually urged againſt the duty of prayer. I ſhall therefore without farther preface, proceed to ſtate them diſ-

tinctly, and to offer ſuch ſolutions of the ſeveral difficulties which have been raiſed on this ſubject as ſeem beſt adapted to ſatisfy the virtuous and pious mind.

Firſt then, it is objected by ſome, that an omniſcient God knows already what we want, before we aſk it; and to what purpoſe do we aſk thoſe things which he already knows we ſtand in need of? The anſwer to this objection is evident: that the deſign of prayer is not to inform God of things which he did not know before, this is ſo far from being the deſign of it, that every one, even of the meaneſt capacity underſtands, that, when he addreſſes himſelf to his Maker, he ought to have it expreſsly in his conſideration, that he to whom he prays, knows all his wants already, every circumſtance of his condition, and every thought of his heart. The real deſign of prayer is, in the firſt place, to expreſs, under a lively impreſſion of the preſence of God, the ſenſe we have of our dependence upon him, of our manifold wants, and that he alone is able to ſupply them; and to make this ſenſe more deep and affecting. Now, ſince it is a certain truth that we depend upon God; and have

have numberleſs wants, the ſupplying of which we can expect from God alone; is it not highly reaſonable and natural, that we ſhould acknowledge this in his preſence, and expreſs to him our deſires, and our dependence upon him? Do not ſuch acknowledgments frequently made to him, naturally tend to ſtrengthen our ſenſe of this truth, and to make it more deeply affecting? Will any one venture to aſſert that this truth is not to be thus owned? Where is the man, who dares pretend to have credit and authority ſufficient to controul this truth? Is not this a truth owned by angels in heaven, as well as men upon earth? Is not this a truth which ſhall be for ever owned by a dependent world? Beſides, is not this a truth in which we are deeply intereſted? Is it not of the higheſt importance towards cultivating all other good diſpoſitions, that we have moſt lively impreſſions of this truth, and uſe the moſt natural means of making them lively? As our dependence upon God is the primary, the moſt important of all relations, and the foundation of all others; the deepeſt ſenſe and acknowledgment of it muſt be our firſt, our ſupreme,

and our moſt natural and moſt indiſpenſable duty: our obligation to it can never be extinguiſhed any other way than either by annihilating us, depriving us of our reaſon, or rendering us independent.

Is it not manifeſt that an intimate and habitual ſenſe of our dependent ſtate, has a mighty influence on all the duties which we owe to our creator, and to one another? The ſtrength of our love, the warmth of our gratitude to our maker, and the ſtability of our confidence in him, muſt riſe or fall in proportion as the perſuaſion of our dependence upon him is fainter or ſtronger. And as nothing has a more powerful tendency to inſpire us with love, benignity, and compaſſion to our fellow-creatures, than conſidering them as the children of the ſame great Parent of all, equally depending upon him with ourſelves, for all they enjoy here, or hope for hereafter; ſo, nothing can more effectually check that pride, ſelfiſhneſs and vanity, which leads us to contemn and injure our brethren of mankind, than an habitual ſenſe, that we are as really dependent creatures as they are; that we are as inſufficient for our own happineſs

happineſs as they are; and that he on whom we depend can ſoon raiſe them to our ſtate, or thruſt us down into theirs: why then, may not this truth, moſt certain in itſelf, and moſt important in its conſequences, be owned in the moſt public and religious manner; in that manner, which naturally tends to make the deepeſt impreſſions of it upon our hearts? and that, certainly, is the owning it in direct addreſſes to God himſelf. Why ſhould we not embrace every proper opportunity of acknowledging it, with all thoſe affecting and ſolemn circumſtances, which may contribute to imprint a deep and abiding conviction of it on our minds, and thoſe of all around us? But to ſpeak more directly to the head of petitioning; it is,

A further deſign of prayer, to expreſs, under an actual ſenſe of the preſence of God, our earneſt deſires of having all thoſe ſentiments and pious diſpoſitions, which it is proper for us to entertain and cultivate, conſidered as dependent, reaſonable, ſocial, and guilty creatures. If we feel earneſt breathings after happineſs, after the means that lead to it, and all thoſe pure and worthy affections

which are the principal ingredients of it, we certainly ought to encourage and favour them. If then we find ardent deſires ariſing within us, after the knowledge, the favour, the reſemblance, and enjoyment of God, why may we not expreſs them in that manner, and in thoſe circumſtances, which will contribute moſt to cultivate and increaſe ſuch honourable and worthy motions of the rational ſoul? and, ſurely, the addreſſing ſuch deſires to God is the moſt effectual method of ſtrengthening them. If we believe that God can accompliſh theſe worthy deſires, why may we not aſk it of him? If we hope and truſt in him that he will ſooner or later accompliſh them, why may we not declare our joyful expectations of being at laſt poſſeſſed of them? If we feel our ſouls aſcending to God in love, joy, and praiſe, is it not reaſonable, that we ſhould indulge thoſe delightful ſentiments, and, by repeated acts, confirm and improve them?

If theſe inward emotions of heart are juſt and natural, if we cannot but approve them, if we judge them worthy of being cheriſhed and ſtrengthened; why may we not give full vent to them, in all

all proper methods of outward expreſſion? And, if our own experience, and the teſtimony of the beſt of mankind inform us, that the yielding up our ſouls to the full influences of devout affections, and giving them full ſcope in voice and language, eſpecially in addreſſes to God, are the moſt effectual methods of increaſing that ſtrength and fervour, and of ſpreading their happy effects through the whole of human life; it ſurely muſt be our trueſt wiſdom to employ all theſe means of eſtabliſhing and perfecting them.

It is further objected, that, ſince God is infinite in goodneſs, he is always diſpoſed to beſtow on his creatures whatever is proper for them; and, ſince he is infinite in wiſdom, he will always chuſe the fitteſt time, and beſt manner of beſtowing it. To what purpoſe, then, do we entreat him to do, what he certainly will do, without any ſollicitation or importunity? To this it may be anſwered; that, as it is not the deſign of prayer to give information to our Creator of things he was not acquainted with before; ſo, neither is it the deſign of it to move his affections, as good ſpeakers

move the hearts of their hearers by the pathetic arts of oratory; nor to raiſe his pity, as beggars by their importunities and tears work upon the compaſſion of the by-ſtanders. God is not ſubject to thoſe ſudden paſſions and emotions of mind which we feel; nor to any change of his meaſures and conduct, by their influence: he is not wrought upon and changed by our prayers; for, "with "him there is no variableneſs, nor ſha-"dow of turning." Prayer only works its effect upon us; as it contributes to change the temper of our minds; to beget or improve right diſpoſitions in them: to lay them open to the impreſſions of ſpiritual objects, and thus qualify us for receiving the favour and approbation of our Maker, and all thoſe aſſiſtances which he has promiſed to thoſe who call upon him in ſincerity and in truth: the efficacy of prayer does not lie in the mere aſking; but in its being the means of producing that frame of mind, which qualifies us to receive. If it is ſtill urged, Why do we aſk, if God does not grant merely for the aſking? To this I reply, that, if by aſking be underſtood the uttering of words, and uſing a voice

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and language, in which all the ſymptoms of earneſtneſs and importunity appear; this external part of aſking, I own, ſerves no purpoſe, with reſpect to God; and the only uſe of it is to engage the attention, and raiſe the devotion of our own minds, or thoſe of others. But, if by aſking, be underſtood the inward deſires and breathings of the ſoul after thoſe heavenly diſpoſitions, in which the perfection and happineſs of our natures chiefly conſiſt: in this ſenſe of it, I aſſert, that theſe are the beginnings of virtue: theſe are the means of improving it, both in the nature of things, and by the poſitive appointment of God: theſe are inſeparable from real virtue, as long as it is capable of improvement; which may be for ever, for any thing we know to the contrary; theſe deſires, I ſay, are altogether unavoidable, and muſt ariſe in the breaſts of all who have any degree of real goodneſs. Whoever has had the leaſt glimpſe of the beauty and excellence of real virtue, is not ſatisfied with ſuch views of it as he has already attained; but pants after a clearer and ſtronger view of its everlaſting worth and importance. Whoever has felt that pleaſing

ſerenity, that lively joy, and delightful liberty, which ariſes from any conſiderable degree of ſuperiority to worldly paſſions, longs with ardor, nay, almoſt with impatience, to obtain an entire conqueſt over them: and whoever has taſted the ſublime, the divine pleaſures of true devotion, breathes with the greateſt fervour after the full and uninterrupted enjoyment of them. To thoſe, then, who aſk why we cheriſh the inward deſires after the heavenly graces, and ſtudy to cultivate them by prayer, the anſwer is plain; that the doing ſo is the neceſſary conſequence of real virtue, both in its firſt and feebleſt, and in its higheſt and moſt perfect ſtate, at leaſt while in this world.

But, if it ſhould be ſtill urged, that, though we muſt have the deſires, though we ought to entertain and cultivate them, yet this is no ſufficient reaſon for our offering them up to God, and entreating him to accompliſh them: why may we not deſire all the divine virtues, and frequently repeat the deſire in our minds with pleaſure and with ardor, without directly addreſſing it to God, whoſe infinite goodneſs inclines him to fulfil it as ſoon

ſoon as his unerring wiſdom ſees fit? To this I anſwer, that it is impoſſible for the human mind to ſtop at the deſire: it feels a powerful impulſe, urging it forward to beg God to beſtow what it wiſhes for with vehemence: and this very argument, which is urged againſt the lifting up holy deſires to God; that he is infinite in goodneſs, and willing to gratify them; is a principal motive for offering them up; and makes it impoſſible for a well-diſpoſed mind to abſtain from it. Since then, there is a determination in our nature, leading us to pray; ſince there is a law of external revelation commanding us to pray; ſince our own minds, on the calmeſt reflection, approve of praying, as being an explicit and natural acknowledgment of our dependence on our Maker, and a declaration, that we will gratefully receive the bleſſings we pray for, as the free gifts of his bounty: and ſince prayer is a mean of enlivening and ſtrengthening the beſt diſpoſitions in our ſouls; we may conclude, that it is not only an innocent and harmleſs exerciſe; but, that it is our indiſpenſable duty to be frequently employed in it.

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It is further urged, that there is no juſt ground of expecting any immediate light or aid from heaven, in conſequence of the moſt ſincere and fervent prayer: for after the moſt accurate inquiry that can be made into the workings of the human mind, there is nothing to be perceived, but what may be the natural effect of proper motives and arguments." In anſwer to this; let it be obſerved, that even ſuppoſing there is no good diſpoſition awakened in the human ſoul, where the proper conſiderations and motives have not been laid before it: yet there may be good reaſons for believing, that there is ſome ſecret and undiſcernible aid of heaven concurring with thoſe conſiderations and motives; diſplaying their whole importance and force to the mind; fixing the attention of it to conſider them; and laying it open to feel their whole power and influence. This at leaſt muſt be allowed, that the ſame motives, laid before the minds of different perſons, do not produce the ſame effects: in two perſons, who ſeem equally capable of diſcerning the ſtrength and force of motives; who ſeem to have beſtowed equal attention in weighing

weighing them; and whoſe paſſions ſeem to be equally capable of reſiſting; the effects they produce are widely different. Beſides, it deſerves our moſt attentive conſideration, that there is no inſeparable connection betwixt the cleareſt and juſteſt views of the excellence and importance of moral and ſpiritual objects, and thoſe feelings and affections of heart which correſpond to them: a man may have the juſteſt and ſublimeſt ideas of all the human, ſocial, and divine virtues, while he remains in a great meaſure, or altogether, without any feeling of them in his heart. There are many inſtances in the world, of men, who have formed the pureſt and moſt exalted conceptions of the divine perfections, who can ſpeak of them with dignity, and are highly delighted with the theory and contemplation of them; and yet feel almoſt nothing of that true devotion of heart, which ſhould be awakened by them. In like manner, a man may have his mind ſtored with the moſt exact and delightful ſpeculations concerning the beauty and worth of temperance, integrity, ſincerity, benevolence, friendſhip, humility, and all the human and ſocial virtues;

tues; may be capable of ſpeaking and writing about them, to admiration; while he ſtill continues under the power of the loweſt ſenſuality, and a ſelfiſh malignant diſpoſition. On the other hand, it may be obſerved, that thoſe who are leſs acquainted with the delightful theories of virtue and religion, who have not ſuch exact and perfect notions of them, and who, from a neceſſary attention to other things, are ſeldom employed in thinking on them; yet are more uniformly governed in life, by the natural influence of the pious and virtuous diſpoſitions themſelves, than the greateſt philoſopher or divine, who ſpends his days in contemplating the ideas of them, and thoſe views of things which ſhould excite them. Now, as it is the good diſpoſitions themſelves, that conſtitute the ſoul and eſſence of virtue: as they only give the true dignity to our minds, and beauty to our lives; as they only can form the character which is worthy and acceptable in the ſight of God; ſo, they are always repreſented in ſcripture, as the fruits and effects of the Holy Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit "is love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, gen-

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"tleneſs, goodneſs, faith, meekneſs, "temperance." From theſe obſervations, it plainly appears, that after we have got the pureſt and cleareſt ideas of religion, and the fulleſt views of thoſe motives which ſhould engage us to the practice of it; there is ſtill ground to pray, that God may bleſs us with thoſe divine affections of heart, which are the only real ornaments to our ſouls, the only laſting foundations of their peace and happineſs. Our ideas are but pictures and images of the things themſelves: and as the picture of a feaſt cannot ſatisfy our our hunger, nor the picture of a fire warm and enlighten us; ſo the fineſt ideas of virtue and religion cannot make us good and happy, without thoſe diſpoſitions of heart, which ſhould be raiſed and kept alive by them.

The doctrine of the need of divine aſſiſtance in acquiring the habits of virtue hath been ſo deeply felt by the more conſiderate part of mankind, that it hath extorted a confeſſion of it, even from thoſe, whoſe ſpeculative principles ſeemed to lead them to a denial of it. For we find that ſect of the heathen philoſophers, who laid the foundation of their ſyſtem in

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the diſtinction betwixt things in our power, and out of our power; (meaning by the former, our good diſpoſitions, reſolutions, and actions; and by the latter, the external enjoyments of the world, which depend on a thouſand accidents, over which we have no command;) even they I ſay, in oppoſition to their favourite diſtinction, inculcated the uſefulneſs and importance of prayer.

However, thoſe who will not allow any immediate influence of the Deity upon the human mind, but aſcribe every thing there to the natural force of arguments and motives; ought to conſider, that it is only going one ſtep farther, and they come to God, and muſt own him as the original Author of all. It is God who has made the mind of man capable of perceiving motives, and of being wrought upon by them: it is God, who in the courſe of his Providence, has preſented ſuch a train of motives to any one's mind, as has engaged him to practiſe all the virtues of a holy life: to God, therefore, the praiſe of it is to be given. And there ſtill remains abundant reaſon to pray to him, that he may, in the unſearchable wiſdom and goodneſs of his Providence,

Providence, continue to preſent ſuch views of things to the mind, as may determine it always to chooſe the virtuous and worthy part.

Farther; Some may poſſibly alledge that they have no need of prayer, and ſay, What ſhould I pray for? Shall I pray that God may enlighten my mind with the knowledge of my duty, and make me perceive the excellence and importance of piety, ſincerity, truth, integrity, charity, and all thoſe virtues which dignify the ſouls of men, and beautify their lives and manners? I know all theſe things already, and conduct my life by them.

How much is it to be wiſhed, that every one who thinks or ſpeaks in this manner, would ſeriouſly aſk himſelf, Have I already attained as clear and diſtinct views of the worth and importance of all the heavenly virtues, as are attainable by mankind? Have they as ſovereign and commanding an influence over my heart and life, as ever they had over any of the ſons of men? Am I ſure there is nothing farther to be ſeen, nothing higher to be felt? What if human nature is capable of ſtronger and brighter

brighter views of the worth and majeſty of the great virtues of the ſpiritual life, than I have yet obtained? Nay, may I not ſuppoſe that many of the children of men have actually attained them, and conducted their lives more unerringly under the power and influence of them? Have I any ambition remaining? any thing of that divine ambition of aiming at a tranſcendency in what is great and good, in what is the ſole glory of a reaſonable being? Shall I not then aſpire after the higheſt ſenſe, and the ſtrongeſt impreſſion of them, that my nature is capable of? Is there a great Father of lights, the enlightener of all minds, the everlaſting lover and friend of truth and righteouſneſs? Has he declared that he is ready and willing to enlighten thoſe who aſk wiſdom from him? Has he aſſured us, that there is a diſpenſation of grace and light carrying on in the world, under his Son Jeſus Chriſt; by which thoſe bleſſings are perpetually imparted to all who ſincerely aſk them? Has he already enlightened, in a ſuperior manner, thoſe ſouls which lay themſelves open to his influence? And, ſhall I refuſe to aſk his heavenly wiſdom, and

live

live contented with a ſmaller portion of it, when a greater may be obtained? Surely no true lover of virtue, no one who has any real greatneſs of mind, can bear the thought.

May we not further enquire of thoſe who have ſuch complacency, and ſatisfaction in their own characters and conduct; do you find nothing in the preſent temper and diſpoſition of your mind, which you have reaſon to complain of, and which you deſire to have rectified? Are there no imperfections to be corrected, no virtuous affections to be refined, confirmed, ſtrengthened, and perfected? Are you already poſſeſſed of that degree of love to God, and true virtue, which pervades the whole ſoul, controuls the power of all the inferior paſſions, eſtabliſhes a perpetual ſerenity within, and animates you with the utmoſt joy and alacrity, in practiſing all the virtues of a worthy life? If ye imagine ye are already raiſed to the utmoſt ſummit of perfection; we may ſafely venture to aſſert, that ye are miſtaken; and that ſelf-love has blinded your eyes, and made you paſs too favourable a ſentence upon yourſelves. This fond imagination, that ye

are

are already perfect, is almoſt a demonſtration, that ye are yet at a very great diſtance from it: ye have certainly fixed too low a ſtandard of religion: your intellectual eye is not quick and piercing enough, to diſcern the idea of perfection ſet before you in the law of God, which ye ought perpetually to have in your view, and to be aſpiring after, with the utmoſt ardor. There are but few to be found, who have attained to the juſteſt and higheſt taſte of the true ſublime in heart and life: whoever has had a clear and diſtinct view of it, will not flatter himſelf that he has reached it: nay, he will be fully ſenſible, that he has not yet approached near it: and whoever fondly imagines that he is come up to it, has not diſtinctly perceived it. That man muſt have a low underſtanding, and a vain heart, who is thus ſatisfied with himſelf; who fancies he has attained to the truly great and perfect in temper and conduct: and whoever is thus eaſily ſatisfied with himſelf, is commonly the only perſon who is ſo: or at leaſt, the number of thoſe will be few, who paſs the ſame judgment on him, that he does on himſelf. The higher any one advances in religion,

ligion, his views are proportionably opened and enlarged. That moment the virtuous man has gained the victory over ſome bad paſſion he has been long ſtruggling with, he ſees ſome other one not quite ſubdued within him; and that moment he reaches to ſome certain pitch of virtue he had in his view, he diſcerns ſome higher pitch of it, at a great diſtance from him: in this, he reſembles a traveller in a large champaign country; who, this hour, ſees nothing beyond a ſmall eminence, which terminates his view at a diſtance; the top of which he no ſooner gains, than a new extent of country fills his eye, equal to that he has already paſſed. Since then, there is ſtill ſomething yet unattained in the ſpiritual life, can we reſtrain ourſelves from praying that the God of grace, the author of every good and perfect gift, would enlighten our eyes to diſcern it, and inſpire us with the divine ambition of aiming and endeavouring to obtain it? Is it not a joyful, nay, a triumphant conſideration, that, by the light and aſſiſtance of the Holy Spirit of God, we may travel on, from perfection to perfection, and approach nearer and nearer to our Maker,

Maker, by higher degrees of reſemblance?

It is moreover objected, that thoſe who ſeem to delight in prayer, do not appear to be better, happier, or more ſucceſsful than thoſe who neglect or contemn it. Where do we find God interpoſing for the proſperity of the pious, or where are theſe happy effects of devotion we are taught to expect? In anſwer to this, it may be obſerved, that there are different ſorts of perſons, who pray from very different views and intentions: ſome pray with no other nor higher view, than that they may gain a character as religious; which may be of uſe to them in the proſecution of ſome worldly deſign. Others uſe prayer as a kind of charm, to render them acceptable to God, or as an atonement and compenſation to him, for thoſe luſts of their hearts, which they are unwilling to mortify, and thoſe iniquities of their lives, which they ſtill continue to commit. Now both theſe ſorts of praying people are to be thrown out of the queſtion: and it is to be confined to thoſe who pray, with ſimplicity and ſincerity of heart; who have no other aim in praying, but that they may become better men,

men, that they may know the will of God more clearly, and may obey it with more conſtancy and alacrity, and who truſt in God, that he "will be to them "a ſun and ſhield, and will give them "grace and glory, and withhold no good "thing from them, becauſe they walk "uprightly." If it be aſked, what the better are theſe perſons for their habitual courſe of prayer, and other acts of devotion? The anſwer is plain, that though they are not, perhaps diſtinguiſhed by outward proſperity, yet they are rewarded with inward enjoyments of a higher and nobler kind. What though God has not beſtowed houſes, lands, riches, pleaſures, honour, ſtrength, or beauty, upon the pious man? theſe are only outward good things, incapable of giving true happineſs to the poſſeſſors of them. But if he has given him greater bleſſings, wiſdom, virtue, truth, integrity, temperance, humility, meekneſs, contentment, with all that inward peace, joy, confidence in himſelf, and hope of immortality which accompanies them; theſe are the true riches, the real treaſures of the immortal ſoul: theſe are ſuch treaſures, as calamity, dan-

ger, death, can never rob it of. It is true, theſe inward pleaſures, theſe mental poſſeſſions are not diſcerned by ſpectators: but thoſe who feel and enjoy them, cannot doubt of their ſuperior worth and excellence. As it is well known, that many of thoſe who put on an air of happineſs, and whoſe outward ſplendor and flouriſhing circumſtances create admiration and envy in ignorant beholders, carry about with them ſecret pains and inward ſtings, which greatly diminiſh, if not entirely deſtroy, their apparent happineſs and contentment; ſo it is as certain, that the ſincere worſhippers of God, even when in the loweſt ſtate, and moſt afflicted circumſtances, enjoy many ſilent pleaſures, and ſecret conſolations, which give them greater happineſs, than worldly men ever taſte amidſt their greateſt gaiety and abundance. He who is conſcious that he poſſeſſes, in the main, that temper and diſpoſition of mind which is acceptable to God, and who maintains an aſſured truſt and confidence in the mercy and goodneſs of his Creator, enjoys an inward reſt and compoſure of mind, which cannot be deſcribed. It is called, in holy ſcripture, "the

"the peace of God that paſſeth all underſtanding." It is an inward calmneſs and tranquillity, like to that of the higheſt heavens. He that enjoys it, is eaſy within himſelf, and pleaſing to thoſe around him. He is free from thoſe inward diſturbances and anxieties which diſquiet the ſouls of other men. His converſation is pleaſant, and his tranquillity appears in the chearful air of his countenance, though ſilent: his mind is open to taſte, with full reliſh, all thoſe good things which Providence has afforded for ſweetening the journey of uman life. But why do I call this happy ſtate of mind, tranquillity only! it is far beyond mere calmneſs or tranquillity. There may be a perfect tranquillity and calmneſs in the air, though the day be overcaſt with thick miſts and clouds. The ſtate of the pious man's mind is like a calm and ſerene day, enlightened and enlivened with the brighteſt ſunſhine. The truly devout man is not barely content with his lot, acting the part aſſigned him, however low it may be, to the beſt of his power: his ſoul riſes up above contentment, to joyful thankfulneſs and praiſe. He rejoices in that exiſtence, in-

to which he has lately entered, and in that rank of creatures to which he is advanced. When he conſiders that he is admitted to be a ſpectator of all the glorious works of nature around him, and that he is not only made capable of contemplating the beauty and order, the grandeur and magnificence of them; but of adoring, praiſing, reſembling, and enjoying their great Creator and ſuſtainer, he is tranſported with wonder, gratitude and praiſe. If theſe are my enjoyments (ſays he to himſelf) in this firſt ſtage of my exiſtence, when my faculties are only beginning to open and unfold themſelves; what new ſcenes, what nobler and more magnificent entertainments may I expect ſhall be preſented to my view, while my faculties are improving and enlarging through millions of ages? What divine, what inconceivable joys, muſt break in upon me, if I ſhould be admitted to ſurvey all the bright and illuſtrious ſcenes of Providence, in many other parts of God's great dominions, and through all the ſucceſſive periods of his righteous government? But what muſt my ſtate be, when I ſhall ſee my Maker himſelf, "not darkly as through

through a glaſs, but face to face?" Here language, imagination fail me. Sure I am, it muſt be ſomething that will be a fountain of unſpeakable delight and everlaſting rapture. "Eye hath not ſeen, "ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive "thoſe great things God hath laid up in "ſtore for thoſe that love him."

The laſt objection I ſhall take notice of, is this, that prayer can be of no importance; for ſince all things are already fixed by an unalterable decree of God, all thoſe whom he has determined to be good and happy, ſhall certainly be ſo, whether they pray or not. In anſwer to this, let it be obſerved, that none ever maintained that God hath determined events to happen without any means. Now we have ſhewn that prayers are the proper means of obtaining ſpiritual bleſſings; and therefore, if we deſire theſe ſpiritual bleſſings abſolutely neceſſary to our happineſs, (and which are not ordinarily appointed but to ſuch as are thus properly prepared to receive and improve them) we ſhould certainly incline to the uſe of all the neceſſary means to prepare ourſelves for receiving them. Does any

ever pretend to reaſon thus; if it be decreed that I ſhall be wiſe and learned, I ſhall undoubtedly become ſo, though I ſhall never converſe, read, think, or exerciſe my underſtanding in any way? Did ever any one ſeriouſly expect he ſhould arrive at knowledge and wiſdom by the mere force of an eternal decree, while he rejected all the means of attaining it? Did ever the huſbandman ſit down and reaſon thus with himſelf; if it be determined in the eternal decree of God, that I ſhall have a plentiful crop, I ſhall certainly reap it in the harveſt, though I neither manure nor ſow my field in the ſeed-time? Now, ſo far as prayer is the mean of rendering us virtuous and happy, it is as abſurd to expect we ſhall arrive at virtue and happineſs without it, as it would be for the huſbandman to hope he ſhall have his uſual crop, though he beſtow none of his uſual labour and induſtry.

In fine, to this and every other objection againſt prayer, it may be replied, that after all that mankind can do, to reaſon themſelves into a perſuaſion of the uſeleſſneſs and abſurdity of devotion, there is ſtill ſomething within them, too ſtrong, too mighty,

mighty, for all their pretended demonſtrations to conquer. The foundation for devotion is laid ſo deep in the human mind, that the utmoſt art and laboured endeavours of a whole life cannot eraſe it. There are certain circumſtances and ſituations of affairs, in which nature will break forth, and ſhew its force to be ſuperior to all artificial reaſonings: there are I ſay, ſuch circumſtances in the courſe of almoſt every one's life, as will oblige the moſt hardned, obdurate neglecter or contemner of prayer, to lift up his ſoul to God with the utmoſt fervor. There are many ſuch circumſtances; but as it would take up too much time to deſcribe them all, we ſhall only mention a few of them. When one is reduced to the utmoſt extremity of diſtreſs, under the preſſure of ſome great affliction, when relations, friends, and others, ſtand around, but cannot give any relief, or adminiſter any conſolation; where is the man to be found, whoſe ſpeculative opinions can then maintain their power over him; and reſtrain him from looking up unto God, and imploring aid and relief from him? In all caſes too, of ſudden extreme danger, do not we ſee how naturally men

fly to God, and invoke him with the utmoſt fervency, to help and deliver them? In like manner, when the poor, the weak the friendleſs man, is ſorely wronged, and grievouſly oppreſſed by the great and powerful ones of the earth, and ſees no poſſible way of redreſs from men; does he not call upon the great judge of all, to protect the injured, and plead his righteous cauſe? Again, when grievous crimes are laid to an honeſt man's charge, of which he is entirely innocent, eſpecially when accompanied with ſuch circumſtances of probability, as that his friends, and thoſe who are inclined to judge moſt favourably of him, cannot help ſuſpecting that he is guilty; does he not then naturally appeal to the all-ſeeing and un-erring judge, and entreat him to vindicate his innocence, and clear his good name? Theſe things are felt in mankind, by a ſudden impulſe of nature, without any deliberate reflection. Beſides theſe inſtances, we may take notice of the two following: firſt, when any one is about to leave the world, and bid an everlaſting farewel to all the enjoyments of it; when all hope of reſtoration to health, or even of prolonging life

life in a lingering diſeaſe, is taken away; is there any one who can then abſtain from praying, that the great and good Being, who brought him into the world and led him through all the different ſtages of life, may continue his providential care, conduct him ſafely into the untried world of ſpirits, and be his guide through all the periods of his exiſtence? And ſecondly, when any one ſtands by, and ſees the expiring agonies of his deareſt friend, for whom he felt the warmeſt love, and higheſt eſteem; in whom he repoſed an unreſerved confidence; when he ſees that all thoſe talents, virtues and excellencies, which delighted his ſoul, are ſoon to ceaſe, as to this world; can he help wiſhing and praying, with the utmoſt ardor, that ſuch a ſoul, with all its virtues and accompliſhments, may ſurvive the diſſolution of his mortal body, and that he may enjoy his delightful ſociety in another and better ſituation of things, where there ſhall be no danger of death and ſeparation any more?

But why do I inſiſt on theſe particularly alarming circumſtances, as the only proofs that mankind are determined, by the very frame of their nature, to have recourſe

to Almighty God? For as ſoon as the faculties of the reaſonable ſoul begin to open and unfold, it appears to be in a poſture (I had almoſt ſaid, in an act,) of devotion. Do not we ſee all mankind breathing after knowledge and happineſs? Do not they all purſue truth and happineſs, however far miſtaken they may be, as to the kind of it? This ardent deſire in the human ſoul, is ſo natural, ſo eſſential to it, that perhaps, there cannot be a juſter, or better definition given of it, than that it is, a rational being panting for knowledge and happineſs. It muſt be owned, that theſe breathings of the ſoul after truth and felicity are not directed immediately to God, nor explicitly expreſſed in words: and yet as there is no notion or concluſion of reaſon more natural, or obvious to the ſoul, than its dependence on God, and that he is the ſovereign diſpenſer of its lot, the ſource from which all its excellency or happineſs muſt flow; prayers are its moſt natural exerciſe, and even theſe inſtinctive deſires may juſtly be called natural prayers. They diſcover a plain tendency of the ſoul towards God, the eternal fountain of light and happineſs:

happineſs: they are ſure indications, that there is ſome idea of truth and happineſs inſeparable from the human mind; and that there is a natural inſtinct in it, which leads all men to ſeek after and purſue ſome ſpecies or other of good, and even to implore it from God.

From all theſe obſervations and reaſonings, it is hoped we may conclude, that the neglecting or contemning of prayer, muſt be owing to prejudices, cheriſhed and fortified with art and care; and not to any dictate of reaſon, or impartial inquiry into the ſtate and tendency of the ſeveral workings of the human mind: and that none can have ſufficient reaſon to adopt the language of the text, "What profit ſhall we have if we pray unto him?"

Let us then "continue inſtant in "prayer, and watch thereunto with all "perſeverance."

SERMON IV.

THE CONDITION OF THE WICKED NOT TO BE ENVIED.

PSALM LXXIII. 3.

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

IT appears from this psalm, that the author of it had been perplexed, with what has in all ages been a common and popular objection against the providence of God, the prosperity of wicked men, and

and the afflicted condition of the righteous in this world. This he repreſents in ſtrong and lively colours, deſcribing the vicious man in the moſt affluent circumſtances, while men of the ſtricteſt integrity are oppreſſed with various calamities: and his perplexity on this account appears to have been by no means wholly deſtitute of foundation: for though, generally ſpeaking, the difference be not ſo great in fact, even in this life, in favour of vice and irreligion; though in moſt inſtances goodneſs does not ſuffer, neither is wickedneſs proſperous and triumphant; but good and evil are promiſcuouſly and indifferently diſpenſed, and happen without any remarkable diſtinction, according to the natural tendency of things; yet, if there could be a caſe ſuppoſed, and conſequently if a caſe might actually happen, in which wicked men might be gainers, and good men ſufferers upon the whole, it muſt neceſſarily lead us to conclude, either that there was no Providence at all, or that the government of the world was weakly and unjuſtly adminiſtered. Whereas, on the contrary, if it appears, that virtue, though labouring

ing under the utmoſt diſcouragements and difficulties, is not only more conducive to the good of mankind in general, but even to the happineſs of particular perſons, than vice in its moſt admired and envied circumſtances, the concluſion of the Pſalmiſt upon an impartial ſurvey of the whole matter muſt paſs for an undoubted truth, that notwithſtanding this ſeeming irregularity, "God is good "to Iſrael, even to ſuch as are of a clean "heart:" and beſides this, we are hereby furniſhed with one of the ſtrongeſt poſſible motives to relinquiſh our ſinful courſes, and apply ourſelves to the practice of piety and virtue.

There are no arguments ſo likely to convince and prevail upon mankind, as thoſe drawn from intereſt; and it muſt be beyond diſpute, their intereſt to be virtuous, if it can be ſhewn, that virtue has a neceſſary tendency to promote the higheſt perfection and happineſs of human nature, and vice to degrade it and make it miſerable: if it can be ſhewn, that if a good and bad man are placed in equal circumſtances, religion and virtue will contribute vaſtly more to the enjoyment of the one, than irreligion and wicked-

wickedneſs can to that of the other, even in the preſent life; that its pleaſures are of a much nobler kind, more ſolid and durable; that it will give him a more exquiſite and exalted taſte of all the delights of proſperity, and adminiſter more effectual conſolation and ſupport in times of affliction and calamity; and finally, that it affords him an encouraging proſpect, beyond this vain, uncertain, and confuſed ſcene of things, while wicked men are diſtracted with dreadful apprehenſions of future puniſhment. This alone muſt be ſufficient to demonſtrate wherein our true intereſt lies, and nothing farther can reaſonably and fairly be demanded to prove the excellence and great advantages of a religious life, or the folly and miſchievous conſequences of a contrary courſe. Such light as this would infallibly direct our courſe in all common caſes; and therefore it is acting in a perverſe oppoſition to our own happineſs, if it has not its effect in an affair, which, though it be leſs attended to by the generality of mankind, is in reality infinitely more important. But if it can be proved over and above this, that a good man under the greateſt troubles, is in a much

much happier ſtate upon the whole, than a ſinner advanced to all the wealth, honour and ſenſual pleaſure, which covetouſneſs, ambition and luxury can prompt him to deſire, or a lively imagination repreſent; the argument for virtue muſt then be irreſiſtible, and men muſt ſurely be deſtitute of common reflection if they are not determined by it.

Let us then ſuppoſe a wicked man to be not only placed in ſuch eaſy circumſtances as exempt him from the cares of life, but to live in pomp and ſplendor; let him have all the honours that may gratify his ambition and vanity; let him poſſeſs wealth and power, and all the opportunities for worldly good that his heart can wiſh; let there be added to this a vigorous conſtitution, a ſettled ſtate of health, together with ſecrecy and ſucceſs in all his baſe and diſhonourable undertakings, ſo that he can follow his inclinations without prejudice to his reputation or temporal intereſt; let him beſides this be an atheiſt in principle, as well as a libertine in practice, and conſequently be free from thoſe uneaſy reflections, which the belief of a Providence and a judgment to come might occaſion. On the

the contrary, let the virtuous man labour under pain and ſickneſs, deſtitute of the proper conveniences and accommodations of life; and beſides this, let us ſuppoſe him to be perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake, to be the deriſion of his fellow-creatures, and to ſuffer the loſs of liberty, and the ſoreſt trials upon the account of his religion.

Upon a view of the two caſes as they have now been repreſented, men of little reflection may be apt to look upon the cauſe of virtue as defenceleſs; and pronounce the ſinner to be the happier man. Yet ſound reaſon will teach us otherwiſe, even upon this very unequal and aggravated repreſentation of their reſpective circumſtances.

Allowing the two caſes as they have been above deſcribed, there is not even in this life ſo much difference in reſpect of real happineſs and miſery, as there may ſeem to be at firſt ſight, between the wicked man in his elevation, and the good man in his loweſt diſtreſs.

For we are to conſider, firſt, that there is a great difference in the nature of their reſpective pleaſures, the advantage of which is on the ſide of virtue.

The

The pleaſures of a good man are the exaltation and improvement of his nobleſt faculties, pleaſures peculiar to rational beings, of the ſame kind with the happineſs of God himſelf, the fountain of perfection and bleſſedneſs, and conſequently ſolid and permanent: whereas the pleaſures of ſenſe are ſlight and ſuperficial; we enjoy them in common with inferior creatures; they are not only empty and unſatisfying, becauſe inadequate to the large deſires of the human mind, but when intenſely purſued are inconſiſtent with intellectual and moral pleaſures, which are of vaſtly ſuperior excellence. Again, the vicious advantages ariſing from wealth, honour, and worldly greatneſs, are chiefly imaginary, trifling, or deſpicable; and conſequently not worthy to be compared with thoſe ſublime joys which ſpring from a true greatneſs of ſoul, and a hope of having the approbation of the all-wiſe Governor of the world. A man indeed whoſe taſte is ſo depraved, may have all he deſires, and no idea of happineſs beyond what he enjoys as an animal being. But will any one pretend to ſay, that his falſe notion deſtroys the real difference of things, or

that

that a life guided by reaſon and religion, which refine, enlarge and exalt the human mind, is not far more eligible than ſuch mean enjoyments as are unſuitable to the faculties of the ſoul, and a reproach to its nature and dignity?

But further; Though it were poſſible for a wicked man to free himſelf from the belief of a wiſe and righteous Governor of the world, the inſpector and judge of his actions; yet his reaſon, if it be not quite extinguiſhed, may condemn his vicious purſuits as unbecoming his character, and a ſtain and blemiſh to human nature: for there are many, who ſeem to have diſcarded all thoughts of accountableneſs, and of future rewards and puniſhments, who cannot get rid of their natural ſenſe of good and evil. This alone may repreſent the deformity of their vices, in ſo ſtrong a manner, as to create much inward ſhame and confuſion, and make them ſo often uneaſy with themſelves, as to imbitter their moſt admired and applauded pleaſures: whereas, when the good man looks back upon the regularity of his paſt life, and views the ſincerity of his intentions, and endeavours upon the whole to pleaſe God,

God, the reflection must afford rational satisfaction, because he has laboured to act as became a rational being, he has "set the Lord always before him," and confides in his care and goodness to support him now, and acknowledge him at last.

Lastly; Though a wicked man in the midst of sinful pomp and mirth, may have no fear of death upon account of its consequences; yet as it will put an end to all his power of gratifying himself, as it will rend him from this beloved world, where all his happiness centres, and can open to him no other scene, it must create great uneasiness of mind; and this uneasiness will be the stronger, the more numerous his enjoyments are. So that it is hardly possible for a sinner, who enjoys an uninterrupted course of prosperity, to attain a perfect indolence of mind and indifference about dying; but, on the contrary, it is highly probable, he will always be perplexed and distracted at the thought of it: or, if he could attain to such a stupid insensibility, which is the utmost he can hope for; what is this to the satisfaction that possesses the mind of the religious man, from the

the pleaſing proſpect of a glorious and happy immortality?

Which leads me to obſerve, that if the difference in this life were as great as it appears to be, the good man would notwithſtanding upon the whole be infinitely wiſer and happier than the ſinner in the utmoſt height of his proſperity and grandeur. The poſſibility of a future ſtate, where thoſe who fear God ſhall be rewarded with eternal felicity, can never be diſputed; for every modeſt man will allow thus much at leaſt, that it is not contrary to reaſon, or the moral perfections of the Divine Being; and, even upon this low ſuppoſition, the folly of vice, though it be ever ſo triumphant in this world, will eaſily be made to appear: for it is certainly agreeable to reaſon, and a point of true wiſdom, to part with ſome preſent advantages, and endure ſome hardſhips and inconveniences, for the ſake of an infinitely greater poſſible good, and to avoid an infinitely greater poſſible evil; whereas the wicked man, for the ſake of the low, unſatisfying and tranſitory pleaſures that ariſe from the indulgence of irregular and vicious appetites, forfeits a poſſible title to the higheſt

higheſt happineſs he is capable of through an eternal duration, and incurs a poſſibility of ruin under the moſt dreadful and tremendous circumſtances that it can enter into the heart of man to conceive.

If we advance a ſtep higher, and conſider mankind as entertaining a general expectation of a future immortality, the folly of wickedneſs will be yet more conſpicuous: becauſe, as there is ſuch an infinite diſproportion between the concerns of this uncertain life, and thoſe of eternity, it is rational for us to ſacrifice all our intereſt here, to the proſpect of a good ſo exceeding great and everlaſting hereafter: there is no prudent man but would endeavour to ſecure this, whatever emolument at preſent he might ſurrender for it, or whatever evil he might expoſe himſelf to by the bargain. In this view then the wicked man appears to act the moſt fooliſh part, becauſe he reſolutely perſiſts in a ſinful courſe, the pleaſures of which (if they may be ſo called) are empty and ſhort-lived, when he does not know but he may, nay, when he is inclined to believe he ſhall, by this means forfeit an immortal

mortal felicity, and expoſe himſelf to never-ending miſery.

But if men profeſs to believe a future ſtate of exiſtence, wherein their lot ſhall be determined according to their preſent behaviour, then a courſe of wickedneſs and irreligion muſt be the height of extravagance. For who that deliberately conſiders this life as very precarious, and the poſſeſſions of it ſtill more ſo than life itſelf; and further, that the ſcene which death ſhall open upon us will never cloſe: who that duly weighs ſo ſerious a thought, can without a ſort of diſtraction, take thoſe meaſures which he is certain will render a future ſtate miſerable to him? Such is the conduct of every one who heaps up treaſures, or wantonly gratifies any perverted taſte in this life, and therefore "is not rich towards God."

But we ought to do the argument for religion ſo much juſtice as to obſerve, that the caſes upon which the preceding part of the diſcourſe has been formed, are but imaginary; they are ſo far from being general, that as we have reaſon to believe they never happened in any former age, ſo it is moſt probable they never will happen in future times. For it

it appears in fact, that wicked men are liable to ſickneſs, pain, diſappointments, and all the common misfortunes of life as well as others, there being one uniform courſe of providence obſerved towards all mankind, without any frequent viſible interruption. Nor is religion calculated to deſtroy, but rather to promote the true ſatisfaction of life. It denies us not the ſuperfluities of it in any degree in which to a rational mind they can be deſirable. The man who is governed by it can enjoy theſe things with a much higher reliſh, than he who is ſordidly confined to and ſunk in animal indulgences. His religion teaches him, that "the life of man conſiſts not in the "abundance of the things he poſſeſſes," it ſets bounds to his deſires, it hinders him from "placing his truſt in uncertain "riches," as his ultimate happineſs, and conſequently delivers him from many anxious and perplexing cares and fears. Whereas the cravings of a covetous, ungoverned appetite are inſatiable and endleſs, and conſequently extremely tormenting. Perſons under ſuch an influence purſue an imaginary good, and from the fatigue and dread which one

way or other attends and follows unlawful gains, they truly find, as Solomon ſays "nothing but vanity and vexation "of ſpirit.

What has been ſaid with regard to riches, is alſo true as to worldly honour; religion does not reſtrain men from endeavouring to obtain it by juſt and truly honourable methods; and it is the only thing in the world that can enable them to preſerve under it an equal temper of mind, that is neither inſolent in advancement, nor will be confounded and ſink beneath itſelf in diſgrace. But it may be queſtioned, whether this be indeed one of the advantages of human life, as it expoſes men to ſuch various temptations, and is ſo uncertain and dangerous. Or if it be an advantage, it can be but a ſmall one, ſince it is chiefly ſo in opinion, it wears a gilded outſide, which dazzles ſuperficial minds, but which in itſelf conveys but little real ſatisfaction: whoever therefore for this relinquiſhes knowledge and virtue, muſt be an enemy to his own real intereſt; and the circumſtances of that man muſt be much more deſirable, who having a modeſt, humble mind, ſuits his deſires to his condition,

dition, and readily ſacrifices a fantaſtic good to the nobler delights which a courſe of virtue propoſes and affords.

And finally, religion allows of ſenſitive pleaſure, as far as the regular inclinations of nature require, and as is conſiſtent with our own and others advantage. By controlling our appetites for the preſervation of our health, and for the rectitude and peace of our minds, it conduces greatly to our benefit in this world.

Indeed the uſefulneſs of religion, and its admirable ſubſerviency to the welfare of men, is ſeen in nothing more than in ſuch reſtraints, by which it hinders our preferring the leſs, and ſecures our poſſeſſion of the greater bleſſing; nay, by which it keeps us from doing ourſelves a real miſchief, and obliges us to purſue that which will render us as happy as this ſtate of things will admit of.

Add to this, that it may be doubted, whether by confining ourſelves within thoſe bounds which virtue preſcribes, we do not enjoy even ſenſual gratifications in greater perfection, than thoſe who are immoderate in the uſe of them. For the ſenſes are blunted by too much exerciſe,

the appetite is palled, and in conſequence all that ſucceeds muſt be in proportion flat and inſipid. But, however this be, the pleaſure of commanding an irregular propenſity, is greater than any that can ariſe from a compliance with it. Such a conqueſt is great and manly, and conſequently the ſatisfaction that reſults from it, muſt have a ſolid foundation, and improve upon reflection: whereas forbidden enjoyments leave a ſting behind, they will not bear a review, becauſe they are the abuſe of thoſe faculties which our maker has given us. Beſides this, it is very obvious, that by theſe means, perſons often ruin their reputation, conſume their ſubſtance, prejudice their conſtitutions, darken their underſtandings, and where there is a notion of a God and Providence, which very few, if any can get rid of, fill the mind with confuſion and terror, eſpecially in the times of affliction, and at the hour of death, when the future ſtate opens upon them, and their doom will be decreed for ever.

So that it appears in general according to the natural courſe of things, that the practice of virtue has a much more probable tendency to improve the happineſs

neſs of every circumſtance of life, and mitigate the evils of it, than that of vice: it appears alſo, that nothing can be objected to its being the intereſt of mankind even in this world, but the caſe of perſecution for conſcience ſake, which rarely happens, and would happen ſeldomer than it does, if zeal and prudence were juſtly proportioned and tempered together: and even this in its greateſt ſeverity is recompenſed in part here by the pleaſure of ſuffering in a good cauſe, and the aſſurance of the approbation, favour and ſupport of the righteous judge of the world; and hereafter it will be infinitely over-balanced by an exceeding and eternal weight of glory; when the wicked ſhall be puniſhed with everlaſting deſtruction from the "preſence of "the Lord, and the glory of his power."

SERMON V.

THE WISDOM OF REGARDING COUNSEL.

PROVERBS xii. 15.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.

HOWEVER such a concession may expose us to the severe imputation in my text, it must be owned, that the generality of mankind are very partial to their

own ſchemes, and immoderately addicted to their own ways of thinking and acting. However their judgments be formed, whether deliberately, or raſhly; however their meaſures be concerted, whether wiſely or weakly; they reſolutely adhere to them, and perſiſt in them at all adventures. Every man's way is, and muſt be, in ſome degree, acceptable to himſelf; otherwiſe he would never have choſen it. But nevertheleſs whoever is wiſe, will be apt to ſuſpect and be diffident of himſelf; and upon that account be willing to "hearken unto counſel:" whereas the fooliſh man being, in proportion to his folly, full of himſelf, and ſwallowed up in conceit, will ſeldom take any counſel but his own; and for that very reaſon becauſe it is his own. Hence it often happens, that in oppoſition to all the reaſons and remonſtrances that can be offered him, he continues immoveable in his choice, and thereby expoſes himſelf to many inconveniences that might eaſily have been avoided. Thus his intereſt falls a ſacrifice to his vanity, and he never gains wiſdom till he has dearly paid for it. Nothing will convince him that he needs other men's counſel, till he finds

finds himſelf bewildered in his own devices.

In treating of this ſubject, I ſhall firſt conſider it in general, and ſecondly with a particular regard to our main concern. Conſidering it in general, the folly of rejecting counſel, and the wiſdom of hearkening to it, may evidently be made appear on the following grounds.

Firſt; The mind of man is not only finite, and limited, but of a ſhort extent, and a narrow comprehenſion. When he has improved it as much as he can (which is ſeldom the caſe) ſtill his views will be very imperfect, and his knowledge inconſiderable. When he has ſought and ſearched as far as he is able, innumerable things will eſcape him; and he is ſure to find himſelf frequently at a loſs. Should we ſuppoſe all human knowledge put together; comparatively ſpeaking, it would amount to very little. Like a great number of rivulets united in one ſtream, it would bear no proportion to the vaſt and boundleſs ocean of truth. How ſmall a pittance then muſt that be which falls, or can fall, to any particular perſon's ſhare? Whatever pains he has taken, whatever enquiries

he has made, in numberless cases and respects he finds himself in the dark; very often puzzled and perplexed, and wanting help on almost every occasion. Like a traveller in a strange road, he must either take directions, or frequently lose his way, and wander he knows not whither. Nothing is more absurd than to imagine that any man can be too wise to learn, or too knowing to need instruction. Nay whoever entertains such a thought in respect of himself, does thereby demonstrate his own folly, and prove himself egregiously ignorant. And this holds equally true in points of speculation, and matters of practice. As every man wants a communication of light for the improvement of his conceptions, so he no less needs counsel for the direction of his actions. Various cases are continually occurring, many exigencies must he meet with in life, wherein he must either take advice, or be a great sufferer. Nor is it any objection against the wisdom of Providence, that men are not always able to direct themselves in the execution of those affairs, and the discharge of those duties which are incumbent on them. On the contrary, it

was

was most wisely ordained, that in this and many other instances, they should mutually depend on each others assistance. As they were intended for society, such a dependence was requisite to bind and cement it; to join their heads and hearts, and enable them more successfully to promote the great ends of life. But to return, since all mens minds are thus defective, and their knowledge short and scanty; since on many occasions they are unable to direct themselves, or remove those difficulties in which they are often engaged; it is manifestly great folly to put entire confidence in their own judgments, and lean solely "on their own understandings." On the other hand to "hearken unto counsel" is a disparagement to no man: so far from it, that it is an indication of wisdom, and the likeliest way to increase it. It is a natural remedy, and a proper supply, for human imperfection; a safe and profitable expedient; and the wisest men are ever most willing to make use of it.

But, the reasonableness of regarding counsel, and the folly of despising it, will more evidently appear, if we consider the diversity of men's talents

and opportunities. Let us suppose a man so far indulging his vanity, as to conclude himself possessed of as much knowledge, and as large abilities, as any person whatever. And to shorten the dispute, let this vain conclusion, this high demand be granted him: still it will be nothing to the purpose; nor will it justify that self-confidence, and neglect of counsel, which are condemned in my text. In some points, some parts of knowledge, he would nevertheless be excelled; admitting, in the main, that equality of understanding which he pretends to. For whatever mens capacities may be, most certain it is that there is great difference and variety among them; I mean not in degree, but in kind. Their talents, even when equally valuable and good, yet point different ways, and are suited to different objects and employments. One man's natural genius lies one way, and another's takes a different turn. And supposing them cultivated alike, the consequence must be, that each of them must excel and be superior to the other in that branch of skill for which nature has fitted him. What we read of supernatural gifts, the same holds

holds true of natural powers; that "they are divided to every man ſeverally" as the donor pleaſes: and that purpoſely, without queſtion, to anſwer better the various uſes and occaſions of life. Suppoſing then any man's capacity as good, in its kind, as he imagines it; yet ſurely he muſt allow that other men may have equal talents and abilities of other kinds. From whence it follows, that if not in all, yet in many caſes, they muſt be able to judge better, and give better directions, than he can pretend to. No man had ever ſuch an univerſal genius as to excel in every thing. And if any one can arrive at ſuch an extravagant degree of vanity, as to fancy ſuch a thing of himſelf, all that can be concluded from it is, that however he may flatter himſelf, he wants counſel more than any man living. But further, as mens talents are various, ſo their opportunities of improvement and experience are very different: not only ſuch opportunities as ariſe from mens reſpective profeſſions, wherein they are doubtleſs moſt capable of judging, and moſt fit to be conſulted; but ſuch as they accidentally meet with in the ſeveral paths and purſuits of life.

Every

Every man of thought and application muſt gain experience in thoſe matters wherein he has been converſant; and the more experience he has, the fitter he muſt ordinarily be to direct thoſe that want it. And want it every man muſt in many things. As no man has a univerſal underſtanding, ſo no man has, or can have, univerſal experience. Both the one and the other are unavoidably limited to a few particulars. The narrowneſs of our minds, and the ſhortneſs of our lives will ſeldom admit of any thing further. As then almoſt every man may be capable of giving advice in ſome points or other; ſo there is no man who is not often obliged to receive it, or to ſuffer through the want of it. Hence it comes to paſs, that the loweſt part of mankind have been ſometimes qualified to inform the higheſt; that in ſome caſes philoſophers have been inſtructed by illiterate ruſtics, and even princes by peaſants. Nor have the greateſt men, on proper occaſions, diſdained to hear and follow the advice of the leaſt. And indeed it is an argument of true greatneſs of mind, as well as good ſenſe and judgment, ſo to do. For moſt certain it is, that the know-

knowledge of the wisest men may be and is often indebted to the experience of those who know the least. And if any man is so vain and so weak as to slight the judgment, and contemn the counsel of other men; if no "way is right in his eyes" but "his own;" he may enjoy his own esteem and good opinion as he can; but the wiser part of mankind will not fail to brand him as Solomon does in my text.

Again, the wisdom of hearkening unto counsel, and the folly of despising it, are further manifest from the following consideration. Let mens abilities be ever so great, and their knowledge ever so extensive; still they ought not, and without great danger and inconvenience cannot trust wholly and entirely to themselves. For those abilities and that knowledge easily may be, and often are, rendered useless by the prejudices and prepossessions of men's own minds. The best understandings are frequently biassed, not to say blinded, by favourite opinions and darling inclinations. Nothing is more common than for men's appetites and affections to bribe their judgments, and seduce them into erroneous and

and abſurd ways of thinking and actiug. They are often entangled and ſet faſt, not through the want of light and knowledge, not through any defect of their heads, but through the deceitfulneſs of their hearts. In many caſes where they could eaſily direct other men, they ſuffer themſelves to be miſled; and are driven into the ſnare by ſtrength of inclination, or the force of habit. The plaineſt points are often miſtaken in the deciſion; the weakeſt deſigns are undertaken, and the ſilliеſt actions done, by men of ſuperior underſtanding and diſtinguiſhed capacity. If it be enquired how this comes to paſs, the anſwer is, that their judgments are clouded by ſome ſtrong prejudice, or corrupted by ſome powerful affection; inſomuch that they can neither hear nor ſee any thing but what makes for one ſide of the queſtion. And though the evidence on the other ſide be much ſtronger, and would appear ſo to them if they would let it; yet ſome way or other it is effectually ſtifled, and ſtands for nothing. In ſuch a caſe as this what availeth any man's abilities? What ſignifies his capacity, while he thus plays tricks with his faculties, and will not uſe

them

them fairly and honeſtly? Is it not plain that he wants counſel and admonition as much as if he were never ſo ignorant? And indeed he really is, on ſuch occaſions, as ignorant as a man can be; only with this difference, that his ignorance is not involuntary, but in a great meaſure wilful; not his misfortune, but his crime. Let mens eyes or underſtandings be ever ſo good, it is at any time in their power to make both uſeleſs by ſhutting them up againſt the light. While a man is reſolved to wink, he muſt and will be as much in the dark as thoſe that want ſight. But this acquired darkneſs, this voluntary incapacity, as well as the want of counſel thereby occaſioned, no where appear more frequently, or more remarkably, than in the tranſaction of our ſpiritual concerns, and what relates to the diſcharge of our duty: which is the

Second point that I propoſed to conſider. Here then the power of prejudice, and the bias of inclination, ſhew themſelves in the higheſt degree. Though we want no knowledge, though our unſterſtandings be ever ſo well informed, we can find ways and means to render it

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ineffectual. We can, and too often do, withſtand the cleareſt evidence, and ſhut our eyes againſt the plaineſt reaſons in the world. And if our ears be ſhut too; if we will not "hearken to counſel," nor ſuffer ourſelves to be adviſed; it is eaſy to ſee what is likely to be the conſequence. Whenever we ſeriouſly reflect on it, we cannot but be aſtoniſhed to think what pains men take, and what arts they uſe, to delude themſelves and impoſe upon their own judgments; and that in affairs of the utmoſt conſequence. "The way of a man," ſays our royal Author, "is "right in his own eyes, though the end "thereof be the ways of death." When we have wandered out of the road, and almoſt loſt ourſelves in bye-paths; we can make ourſelves believe that we have continued all the while in the high-way to truth and happineſs. So ſtrong is this ſelf-deluſion, that it hides from us whatever we have no mind to ſee; and in the midſt of guilt, and danger, ſooths us into an opinion of our innocence and ſecurity. Very often we lay aſide all thoughts of our duty, and keep it quite out of our minds: and when we do think of it, we contrive to think

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just what we have a mind. In respect of what is past, we place our conduct in the best light, and represent our actions in the fairest colours. Our judgments are always favourable, and sometimes directly false; and as much as possible we teach our very consciences to flatter. We speak peace to ourselves, when there is no peace; and conclude ourselves in safety, when we are on the very brink of ruin. In respect of futurity, whatever may be dreadful or disagreeable, is carefully covered, and kept out of sight. On the contrary, we build fair hopes, and lay out fine prospects, in our own imaginations; and what is wanting in truth and probability, is made up with fallacy and fiction. In short, such is the "deceitfulness of sin," and so weakly are we guarded against its frauds; that nothing can be more foolish, nothing more fatal, than trusting wholly to ourselves, and rejecting the benefit of wise counsel and faithful admonition. If we refused other men's advice merely in order to follow the dictates of our reason; though this in many cases would still be folly, yet it would be moderate folly in comparison of what we are often guilty of.

of. We not only neglect other men's underſtandings, but frequently our own. Inſtead of liſtening to our reaſon, as we pretend; we are often only conſulting our inclinations, and taking counſel of our luſts and appetites. And without doubt miſerable counſellers they are. What ſhould we think of that man, who renouncing the protection of law and government, ſhould commit himſelf to the cuſtody of wild creatures, and beaſts of prey? Such, and more fooliſh is his conduct, who abandoning his reaſon, gives himſelf up to the guidance of his luſts and paſſions. For in truth the paſſions of men, when they have once broken looſe from the reſtraints of reaſon and religion, and have gotten their full liberty, are more unruly and more miſchievous than any brutal inſtincts whatever. So great need have we of the direction of our reaſon and underſtanding; and indeed of all the reaſon that we can meet with either at home or abroad. We ſhould carefully "incline our ear unto wiſdom," wherever it is to be found. We ſhould "ſeek her as ſilver," according to our wiſe Author's advice, "and "ſearch for her, as for hid treaſures.

"She

" She is a tree of life to them that lay " hold upon her; and happy is every one " that retaineth her. Then ſhall he walk " in his way ſafely, and his foot ſhall not " ſtumble."

But it is further to be obſerved, that as men's attachment to their own ways, and their averſion to counſel, are frequently owing to the prejudices and partialities of ſelf-love, or the deluſions of ſinful luſts; ſo they are often occaſioned by thoughtleſneſs, negligence, and inconſideration. However apt they may be to miſtake or miſrepreſent their duty; moſt certain it is that they are ſtill more prone to forget it, as well as thoſe important truths that are connected with it. Though they very well know what obligations they are under, and ſufficiently underſtand where their true intereſt lies; yet while theſe things are unconſidered and unthought of, it is much the ſame as if they were unknown. If men will not take care to keep them in mind, but rather endeavour to keep them out; how can it be expected that they ſhould have any influence, or take any effect? Suppoſing therefore that they did not want inſtruction and counſel, yet certainly

tainly they ſtand in great need of faithful monitors; to bring theſe neglected truths to their remembrance; to open their eyes, and recall their thoughts; and, if poſſible, to fix them on thoſe weighty concerns which they are ſo apt and ſo inclinable to forget. To admoniſh and exhort them "daily, leſt they be hardened," or ſtupified, "through the deceitfulneſs of ſin." Such help as this is univerſally wanted; nor can it without extreme folly and deſperate obſtinacy be rejected.

Eſpecially if it be conſidered, how much depends on the care we take of our conduct, and the diſcharge of duty. This is matter not only of great moment, but really of infinite conſequence. When we fail of ſucceſs in our temporal affairs, at moſt we can only ſuſtain a temporal damage, which perhaps may be repaired; and if it cannot, yet it may be borne with patience, and even contentment. For moſt of the things of this world are of ſuch a nature, that we may either do with them, or without them. And moreover, this life itſelf is but a ſpan, and will ſoon be ended. But if we finally miſcarry in our ſpiritual concerns;

concerns; the loss is irreparable, unspeakable, and eternal. If we forfeit the favour of God, and that great and endless happiness which belongs to it; what can there be left to relieve or comfort us? If we lose that mighty good, that inestimable blessing; all our hopes are struck dead at once, and our expectations cut off for ever; we are utterly ruined beyond the reach of remedy; beyond the help of time, and all the powers of patience. Can we then be too careful, too solicitous, about this important affair, this everlasting concern? Can we reject any means, or neglect any opportunities of securing it? Ought we not rather to accept willingly, and even seek diligently whatever may assist us therein, or contribute to our success? Does not that counsel deserve to be hearkened to, which warns us to "flee from the wrath to come," and not to "neglect so great," so eternal a "salvation;" which is meant to withdraw our affections from this vain transitory world, and fix them on the joys and glories of a blessed immortality? In short, if there be any wisdom in refusing and despising admonitions of this nature; it will be impossible

impoſſible to prove that there is any ſuch thing as folly, or even to underſtand what it means.

But after all; however lightly we may eſteem the helps and directions of human wiſdom, yet ſurely the higheſt regard and reverence are due to the divine. Whatever we may think of the advices of meer men; yet this can be no reaſon for neglecting that which comes from God? If we will not mind fallible counſellers; yet ſhall we give no heed to prophets and apoſtles? Shall we not hearken to the Son of God, the Saviour of the world; who came into it on purpoſe to inſtruct and direct us, and guide us in the way to everlaſting ſalvation? Shall we not attend, devoutly and diligently attend, to the counſels of our heavenly Father, and the admonitions of the Moſt High? Can we have more regard to what is "right in our own eyes," than to what is right in his? Dare we not truſt omniſcience? Is it poſſible for us to imagine that infinite wiſdom cannot direct us better than we can do ourſelves? But I ſhall not expoſtulate any further. The thing itſelf ſpeaks ſo plain, that nothing can make it plainer. I ſhall therefore

fore conclude with the words of wiſdom, or rather the God of wiſdom, delivered to us by our royal Author. "Becauſe "I have called, and ye refuſed; I have "ſtretched out my hand, and no man "regarded; but ye have ſet at nought "my counſel, and deſpiſed all my re- "proof: I alſo will laugh at your cala- "mity, I will mock when your fear "cometh: when your fear cometh as de- "ſolation, and your deſtruction as a "whirlwind; when diſtreſs and anguiſh "cometh upon you, then ſhall they call "upon me, but I will not anſwer; they "ſhall ſeek me early, but they ſhall not "find me. For that they hated know- "ledge, and did not chooſe the fear of "the Lord; therefore ſhall they eat of "the fruit of their own way, and be fil- "led with their own devices. But who- "ſo hearkeneth unto me, ſhall dwell ſafe- "ly, and ſhall be quiet from fear of "evil."

SERMON VI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DUTIES OF MORALITY.

MATTHEW XXIII. 23.

Wo unto you ſcribes and phariſees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint, and aniſe, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

IN this paſſage our Saviour cenſures the ſcribes and phariſees for their vile hypocriſy, in expreſſing the greateſt zeal for the

ritual obſervances of their law, while they ſhamefully neglected and made no account of the principal and moſt important duties of it; in being ſuperſtitiouſly nice and ſcrupulous about the tithing of ſome inconſiderable herbs, while they had no regard to juſtice and equity, mercy and charity, faithfulneſs and truth: whereas, on the other hand, though thoſe ſmaller matters which they were ſo zealous about, were not altogether to be diſregarded, yet theſe great and important duties ought certainly to have been the objects of their firſt and chief care. The warmth and indignation with which our Lord reproves the Phariſees for this perverſion of religion, may convince us, that it is of great conſequence to underſtand the nature and value of the ſeveral religious duties which we perform, and to proportion our zeal for them, according to their real importance.

In diſcourſing on this ſubject, I ſhall explain the ſeveral virtues which our Saviour here enumerates; and ſhew that theſe and other moral virtues are the moſt important parts of our duty, and above all other things in it, deſerve our pains and care.

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The firſt virtue which our Saviour ſpeaks of is judgment or juſtice. This, as it is a virtue to be practiſed by men in a private capacity, in which view only I ſhall here conſider it, is a diſpoſition to abſtain from all invaſion of the properties and rights of others, and to render them all the things which they can demand as their own. There are ſome things which all perſons obtain a property in from the bounty of nature, ſuch as their life, health, and liberty; and there are other things which they acquire a right to by their own labour and induſtry, or by fair compact, by legal conſtitution, or the voluntary donations of others, as riches, lands, and by far the greateſt part of the poſſeſſions which they have in the world. The preſervation of their rights and titles to the things which are thus acquired by them, is the firmeſt bond of human ſociety, without which it would be impoſſible for men with any comfort to ſubſiſt together. It is therefore neceſſary that all be allowed to enjoy, uſe, and diſpoſe of things which are their own: and in allowing them to do ſo, without uſurping their property, or detaining any part of it from them, the

virtue of juſtice conſiſts. Contrary to which, is the taking away the life of any man at pleaſure, or when he has done nothing to forfeit it; the wounding or maiming of his body; the depriving him of his liberty; the blemiſhing his reputation; the robbing or ſtealing from him any part of his eſtate; the deceiving him in matters of commerce, and in compacts; and the retaining his debts beyond the time of payment. All theſe practices are violations of the properties and rights of others; and if we would act a juſt and equitable part, we muſt carefully avoid them; or, if we be ſenſible that we have offended in any of theſe particulars, we muſt, to the utmoſt of our power, make a reparation of the injuries which we have done to our neighbours; for till we do this, their rights are violated, and our injuſtice to them is ſtill continued by us.

The next virtue which our Saviour here mentions, is mercy. This conſiſts in a diſpoſition to pity, and to endeavour by all means the deliverance of thoſe who are in miſery, or are liable to it. The foundation of it is laid in that tenderneſs or compaſſion which is natural to

us,

us, which we must feel whenever any objects of distress are presented to our view: this compassion for the miserable, directly leads us to relieve and assist them. And when in pursuance of the tender and humane propensions of our nature, we afford such persons all the relief and help in our power, we then discharge this important duty of mercy. The assistance which we are to give to the miserable, must be of different kinds, according to the nature of the distresses in which they may happen to be: these may in different ways affect either their minds or their bodies, and so our relief and help must reach to either as there is necessity, and appear in all those instances, whereby we may promote either the spiritual or temporal good of our unhappy brethren, and deliver them either from present or from future misery. Thus, for example, the instructing the ignorant; the reclaiming the vicious, by good counsels and advices, and discreet and kind reproofs; the "restoring those "who have been overtaken in a fault, in "the spirit of meekness;" the "supporting the weak," and the "comforting the feeble-minded;" are acts of mercy which

are due to unhappy ſouls; and they are indeed the moſt noble and uſeful expreſſions of it, as they deliver men from the greateſt evils, and make them partakers of the moſt real and durable happineſs. Again; The viſiting and comforting the ſick; the defending the oppreſſed; the feeding the hungry; the cloathing the naked; the vindicating the credit of thoſe whom we know to be falſely accuſed; the repairing the fortunes of ſuch as from a plentiful condition may have fallen into want, by lending to them "freely, hoping for nothing again," and remitting to them all ſuch debts, as cannot be expected but by ſeverities which will quite oppreſs and ruin them; the giving warning to thoſe who are likely to be enſnared by crafty men; the moderating our reſentment of the offences which men commit againſt us, the abating as much as we can of the puniſhment to which the rigour of juſtice would expoſe them, and the putting them to no more pain and uneaſineſs than is neceſſary for the correction of their tempers, the ſafety of the public, and our own reputation and ſecurity for the future: theſe are acts of mercy, which we are to perform

form to our unfortunate brethren, with reſpect to their temporal concerns. This relief and aſſiſtance of the diſtreſſed, is the moſt ſubſtantial expreſſion of mercy that can be; and without it, it is certain, that all the pity that we can entertain for them, and all our kind wiſhes for their proſperity, and all the good words that we can give them, will ſignify nothing at all. St. John cautions us againſt expreſſing our kindneſs to our brethren, only in civil and courteous words, and exhorts us to make it appear in more real and laſting effects. "My "little children, let us not love in word "or in tongue, but in deed, and in "truth." And St. James teaches us the vanity and unprofitableneſs of giving bare compliments to our miſerable brethren, while we with-hold from them that ſupport which we are able to afford them. "If a brother or a ſiſter be na- "ked and deſtitute of daily food, and "one of you ſay unto them, Depart in "peace, Be ye warmed, and Be ye fill- "ed; notwithſtanding ye give them not "thoſe things, which are needful to the "body, what doth it profit?" Such fair ſpeeches are of no uſe to unhappy

men, nor do they prove us to be persons of a humane and merciful disposition. The principles of humanity and compassion must certainly have but very little force in our hearts, when the utmost effect of them consists in kind words, and they do not appear in those beneficent actions, which we have an opportunity and ability for performing.

Another important duty here mentioned by our Saviour, is faith. By this we are not to understand what is commonly meant by the word faith in scripture, the assent of the mind to the truth of some propositions or matters of fact, upon the authority of God, who reveals them; but faithfulness or fidelity in our conversation and dealings with all with whom we have any thing to do. This the word frequently signifies, and it appears to be the meaning of it in this place, because this faithfulness is a virtue of the same rank and kind with the other virtues which our Saviour speaks of, which are all good and amiable in themselves; whereas the belief of divine revelation has no intrinsic goodness, but derives its whole value from the principles from whence it springs, and the efficacy

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which it has for producing the virtues which are essentially worthy and lovely in us. This fidelity consists in having a strict regard to truth in our common conversation with mankind, and in using such simplicity and plainness of expression that they may easily understand our real meaning; in performing all our religious vows and promises to God, and in fulfilling all our covenants and engagements with men; in discharging, according to our best skill and ability, all offices and trusts committed to us, either for the public good, or the advantage of particular persons; in being true and constant in our friendships till we have some just cause to alter; and in promoting carefully the interest of all, whom either by our words, or our behaviour, we have encouraged to have a dependence upon us. Contrary to this is lying, dissimulation, the misleading men by artful and equivocal words, flattery, extravagant compliments and high professions of kindness which do not proceed from the heart, perjury, breach of promise, the laying hold on some little circumstances and points of law to evade an equitable obligation, treachery or remissness in the

execution of any important truſts or offices, falſhood in matters of friendſhip, and neglect of the intereſt of thoſe whom we have allowed to have a confidence in us. Theſe things are all manifeſtly inconſiſtent with truth or faithfulneſs; and if we would practiſe this virtue, we muſt always diligently guard againſt them.

Having thus explained the virtues mentioned in the text; I proceed now to ſhow, that theſe and ſuch like moral virtues are the moſt important parts of our duty, and above all other things in it deſerve our pains and care.

And this may be made abundantly evident both from the principles of reaſon, and the declarations of divine revelation.

It will appear from reaſon, that the moral virtues muſt be the ſubſtance and end of any religion which God would inſtitute among men; whether we conſider the nature of God, or man.

If we conſider the nature of God; he, according to the account which St. John gives of him, "is Love;" a Being of abſolute and perfect goodneſs, who made the world, and preſerves it for the welfare

fare and benefit of his creatures; who intends particularly the happineſs of mankind in all his diſpenſations towards them. It is not therefore to be thought that he would inſtitute a religion among them, the chief deſign of which would not be to engage them to thoſe things which are the great cauſes and means of their happineſs, which are evidently the virtues of juſtice, fidelity, humanity, charity, and the love of God himſelf. Without theſe virtues, life would ſoon become a burthen to men, and they could have no ſatisfaction or enjoyment in it. It is the practice of them, which renders human ſociety agreeable and comfortable to us; they yield us by far the moſt pleaſing ſenſations of any of which we are conſcious; they adorn and perfect our nature, and prepare us for the moſt noble and delightful employments in a future ſtate of exiſtence. Since then the happineſs of mankind depends ſo neceſſarily upon theſe virtues, and flows ſo directly from them, it may be moſt rationally ſuppoſed, that they would be the things which a Being of perfect goodneſs would principally have a regard to in any revelation, and in any laws

laws which he would give to us; and that he would lay much greater ſtreſs upon them, than upon other things, which are not ſo neceſſary, nor tend ſo immediately to the end, which is evidently moſt worthy of him in his dealings with men, the promoting their intereſt and happineſs.

Again; If we conſider the nature of man; we are ſo conſtituted that we cannot but admire and delight in juſtice, faithfulneſs, mercy, charity, and the love of God, more than in any other duties, which can be required by the laws of religion. The wiſe and good Author of our beings, has taken care, in forming us, that theſe virtues which are ſo neceſſary to our happineſs, and which give us the greateſt pleaſures of which we are capable, ſhould carry the moſt lovely appearance to us; ſo that we cannot ſeriouſly attend to them, but we muſt be charmed with them, and above all other things eſteem and purſue them. Whoever with any care reflects upon himſelf, and obſerves the tempers and behaviour of men, will ſoon be convinced that this is a juſt account of the frame of our nature. Now from hence

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it may be concluded, that the great ſtreſs of any religion, which comes from heaven, will be laid upon theſe virtues, which our nature determines us thus to approve; for it would be manifeſtly abſurd and unworthy of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, to ſuppoſe that he would appoint a religion to mankind, which would not correſpond with the nature which he has given them; or which would oblige us, contrary to the inward ſenſe of our minds, and the generous propenſions of our hearts, to purſue any thing more, or ſo much as theſe virtues, in which we diſcern the greateſt worth and excellence.

Thus it appears very evidently upon the principles of reaſon, that the virtues which our Saviour inſtances in as the principal matters of religion, and others of a ſimilar nature, are really the moſt neceſſary parts of it, and more than any other things in it deſerve to be regarded by us.

The ſame thing is ſtill farther evident from the doctrine of the holy ſcriptures, or the declarations of divine revelation.

The ſcriptures every where lay the greateſt weight upon theſe amiable virtues,

tues, and repreſent the practice of them as the main end of religion. Under the Old Teſtament, it is true that God preſcribed to the Jews, a great number of ceremonious external performances; but it is plain, that theſe were things of very little importance, even in their religion, in compariſon of juſtice, equity, and the love of God. The rites and ceremonies of the law, may indeed be reaſonably ſuppoſed to have been inſtituted with a view to ſecure and promote more effectually the practice of theſe virtues: it is certain, that whenever the obſervation of them was not accompanied with moral duties, God was ſo far from regarding it, that he rejected it with the utmoſt indignation and abhorrence. "To what "purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacri-"fices to me, ſaith the Lord? I am "full of the burnt-offerings of rams, "and the fat of fed beaſts, and I delight "not in the blood of bullocks, or of "lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come "to appear before me, who hath re-"quired this at your hands, to tread my "courts? Bring no more vain oblati-"ons, incenſe is an abomination unto "me; the new moons, and ſabbaths,

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" the calling of aſſemblies I cannot away
" with, it is iniquity, even the ſolemn
" meeting. Your new moons, and your
" appointed feaſts my ſoul hateth; they
" are a trouble unto me, I am weary to
" bear them. And when ye ſpread forth
" your hands, I will hide mine eyes from
" you; yea, when ye make many pray-
" ers, I will not hear: Your hands are
" full of blood." After which, he declares to them the proper method of worſhiping and ſerving him: " Waſh
" ye, make you clean, put away the evil
" of your doings from before mine eyes,
" ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well, ſeek
" judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge
" the fatherleſs, plead for the widow."
" Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord," ſays the prophet Micah, " and
" bow myſelf before the high God?
" Shall I come before him with burnt-
" offerings, with calves of a year old?
" Will the Lord be pleaſed with thou-
" ſands of rams, or with ten thouſands
" of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firſt-
" born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of
" my body for the ſin of my ſoul?"
The Prophet ſpeaks this in the name of one, inquiring into the moſt acceptable methods

methods of appeaſing and worſhipping the Deity; and the anſwer returned to him is this: "He hath ſhewed thee, O "man, what is good, and what doth the "Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, "and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" And there are many more paſſages in the ſacred writings of the Old Teſtament, which plainly teach us, that the duties of juſtice, truth, integrity, mercy, and goodneſs in our converſation with mankind, and an humble and reverent deportment towards God, are the moſt excellent and important things in religion, and far more eſteemed by God, than all the ſacrifices and other ceremonies of the Jews, which were accepted by him only when they were in conjunction with theſe virtues, for the ſake of which chiefly, they had been appointed.

And now if theſe virtues were of ſo much importance under the Jewiſh diſpenſation, it may well be thought that they will not be leſs valuable under the goſpel; which is a far more plain and ſimple inſtitution, than the Jewiſh religion was. Indeed the great intention of chriſtianity is ſo evidently to engage men to

to righteouſneſs, truth, and charity, and to the love of God or true piety, that it is unneceſſary to quote particular paſſages to prove it. Whoever with any attention looks into the New Teſtament, will ſoon perceive that our Saviour has, in a particular manner, in almoſt all his diſcourſes, inculcated theſe virtues; that he has laid the greateſt ſtreſs of his religion upon them, and made the eternal happineſs of his followers to depend upon their practiſing them; that by his own conduct and example, he has alſo taught us to prefer them to all other duties; that his apoſtles have likewiſe given us the moſt earneſt exhortations to them, and have mentioned them as the chief ingredients in religion, in thoſe deſcriptions which they have delivered of it; and that the faith of the goſpel, and all the poſitive inſtitutions of it, are of uſe, only when they are the means of promoting theſe divine and amiable virtues in us, which are declared to be the end and perfection of all religion.

From what has been ſaid, we may ſee the great importance of moral duties, and the neceſſity of inculcating them upon chriſtians. It is wonderful to obſerve the

the contemptuous opinion which ſome perſons entertain of morality, who ſpeak of it as a thing with which religion is but little or no way concerned, in which if it has any place, it is only the loweſt and leaſt conſiderable; and who in conſequence of this notion of it, cannot endure to hear it much or earneſtly preſſed upon men; this, according to their common way of expreſſing themſelves, being all legal and carnal, and not preaching Chriſt or the Goſpel: it might, perhaps, have done well enough, according to them, for a heathen philoſopher to have ſpent his time in explaining and recommending the ſeveral parts of moral virtue to his ſcholars; but this cannot be the buſineſs of a teacher of chriſtianity, who has ſo many far more ſpiritual, ſublime, and uſeful ſubjects to entertain himſelf and his hearers with. A little converſation in the world may convince us, that theſe are the ſentiments, which many, who imagine themſelves to be great proficients in the knowledge of religion, have of the duties of morality, and the virtues of a good life. But whenceſoever they may have derived theſe notions, it is certain, that they have not received

them

them from any principles either of reaſon, or revelation. For both theſe agree in placing moral duties at the head of all religion; in making them the matters which God principally values in it, and which it became him above all other things to require from men. Theſe, therefore, every wiſe man will account the ſubſtance of his religion, and will lay no ſtreſs upon other matters in compariſon with them. And whoever would teach religion to any valuable purpoſe, muſt chiefly inculcate theſe duties upon men. Nothing can be more weak and abſurd, than to object againſt the preaching of morality, as if it was not preaching Chriſt. What! Can any thing be more properly called preaching Chriſt, than preaching the moſt eſſential duties of his religion; than preaching what he himſelf and his apoſtles conſtantly, and with the greateſt earneſtneſs, preached, and required from men as abſolutely neceſſary to their anſwering the end of religion, and partaking of the benefits of it? Is it not evident from the whole tenour of their diſcourſes, that they never laid the leaſt weight upon any opinions and doctrines, but only as they were the means

means of producing a good life; and that therefore the only uſe which they could make of any doctrines which they delivered concerning Chriſt, was to propoſe them as ſo many motives to engage men more effectually to the obedience of the laws of Chriſt, or to practiſe thoſe moral virtues which are required by his religion, which are indeed the ſum and ſubſtance, the aim and end of all true religion. Let no man therefore think meanly of morality, or deſpiſe the preaching of it, as uſeleſs and unedifying. All principles which lead men to ſcorn or neglect it, which make religion ſomething different from it or above it; which prefer ſome ſpeculative notions and points of belief, or an attendance on the external duties and ceremonies of divine worſhip, or any matters whatſoever before it, are moſt apparently falſe, and have a fatal tendency to defeat the intention of chriſtianity, and to make it good for nothing; and not only ſo, but to render it a thing of very pernicious conſequence to men, as it will prove, in the falſe light in which ſuch principles ſet it, the occaſion of quieting their conſciences, and adminiſtring peace and comfort to them

them in the practice of vice and wickedneſs.

To conclude; From what has been ſaid, we may alſo learn, whither our endeavours in religion ſhould tend, and what are the things in it, for which we ſhould exert the greateſt zeal. We are indeed to reverence the leaſt of God's commandments, and to perform every duty which he requires from us. But we muſt more eſpecially practiſe thoſe duties, which are moſt excellent in their own nature, and of the greateſt moment in religion; which, as I have ſhewn, are the duties of juſtice, mercy, integrity, and the love of God. We muſt therefore be above all things careful to raiſe and cultivate theſe virtues in ourſelves, and make our belief of the doctrines of the goſpel, and our attendance on the external inſtitutions of it, entirely ſubſervient to this purpoſe: and we are never to imagine ourſelves ſufficiently religious, becauſe we believe truly, and pray frequently, and read the ſcriptures every day, and go to all the ſermons we can hear, and take all occaſions of partaking of the Lord's Supper. The end of religion does not conſiſt in theſe things; but in

in thoſe upright, humane, and generous diſpoſitions with reſpect to mankind, and that reverent and obedient temper towards God, which they are intended to raiſe and increaſe in us. And we only uſe them to good purpoſe, when we are improved in ſuch affections, and ſuch a temper by them. There are a great many perſons, I know, who are apt to run into a miſtake in this matter, to be exceedingly concerned about the external and ceremonial parts of their religion, while thoſe things in which the life and ſubſtance of it conſiſt, are almoſt entirely neglected by them. This was an error which the Jewiſh nation almoſt continually went into, for which their prophets never failed moſt ſeverely to reprove them. And there have been multitudes of chriſtians in all ages who have imitated their example, and fallen into the ſame miſtake, notwithſtanding that the goſpel has removed that, which probably might have been the occaſion of leading the Jews ſo eaſily into it, the load of external rites with which their religion was encumbered; and notwithſtanding it is ſo plain an inſtitution, and appears ſo evidently to conſiſt principally in thoſe virtues

virtues which are ſeated in the heart and mind. I am far from intending to diſcourage any man's zeal, even about the loweſt inſtances of his duty, provided it does not make him negligent about thoſe which are of greater conſequence. Let thoſe who have leiſure from the diſcharge of more important offices, pray as frequently and devoutly, let them read the ſcriptures as carefully and diligently, and let them attend on all the external inſtitutions and rites of religion as punctually and exactly as they can. If they do theſe things with an honeſt intention of improving and confirming themſelves in the practice of virtue, they will certainly find them highly uſeful for theſe purpoſes, and they will be exceedingly blameable if they omit them. But when men are for placing the whole or the greateſt part of their religion in theſe external duties, which are appointed as means and helps to the practice of moral virtue; and when after they have gone their uſual round of praying, reading, hearing, meditating, and receiving the communion, they imagine that they have acquitted themſelves of their duty, and are become very acceptable to God,

though it may be evident to them upon the leaſt reflection, that all theſe devotional exerciſes have made but few or no good impreſſions upon their minds; it is extremely neceſſary to let them know that they are under a groſs deluſion; that theſe duties as they manage them have no religion at all in them, but muſt be looked upon to be only the effects of ſuperſtition or enthuſiaſm. Let us take care therefore to exert our zeal in religion, proportionably to the value of its ſeveral duties; let our chief concern be employed about the virtues of juſtice, fidelity, humanity, and the love of God, which are moſt evidently the end of religion, which recommend themſelves to us by their own intrinſic worth and goodneſs, and which we are bound above all things to practiſe by the moſt ſacred and unalterable of all laws, that of our own nature. Let the raiſing and increaſing theſe amiable virtues in us, be the end of our faith, and all our inquiries after truth and knowledge, and of our uſe of the inſtrumental duties of chriſtianity: and when at any time there happens to be a competition between theſe and any duties of an inferior nature, ſo that we

cannot

cannot peform both; let us always give the preference to theſe excellent and important virtues. Let us take all opportunities of doing juſt, kind, generous, and uſeful actions, though our doing ſo, may ſometimes prevent our obſerving ſome poſitive precepts of the goſpel, or our attending on the outward duties of devotion. This is certainly the way to act moſt agreeably to the nature and intention of religion, and to offer the moſt acceptable worſhip and ſervice to the Deity, who has required homage and obedience from mankind to himſelf, for the more effectual advancement of their welfare and happineſs. To Him may all glory and praiſe be given, both now, and for ever! Amen.

SERMON VII.

ON THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

1 PETER II. 21.

Leaving us an example, that ye ſhould follow his ſteps.

THE examples of great and illuſtrious perſons, who were eminent for ſuperior degrees of moral goodneſs, and for the purity, ſtrength, and ſublimity of their virtues, have in almoſt all ages of the world been held in high veneration;

and it has been thought of conſiderable ſervice to the cauſe of virtue, as well as a reſpect due to the memories of thoſe who have excelled in it, to propoſe ſuch uncommon, ſuch noble and uſeful characters, as a proper pattern for the reſt of mankind to imitate. And for this there is an evident foundation in reaſon, and in the frame of human nature. For it is undeniable from experience, that the force of good examples is much more univerſally felt, than that of the wiſeſt precepts, or the moſt exact and accurate reaſonings: they not only inſtruct, but powerfully perſuade; they excite admiration, inſpire reſolution, work upon the inward native ſenſe of ingenuity, and charm and animate it to exalted and divine improvements. Were we to have the moſt elaborate draught of moral excellence preſented to us in ſpeculation only, we ſhould be apt to eſteem it as a fine picture, and be ſtruck, perhaps, with the beauties and graces of it; but might think it, at the ſame time, wrought up to a romantic ſtrain, and too ſublime to be copied in real life. But when we ſee it as it were ſubſtantiated, and are fully convinced that it has been

been actually exhibited in living characters, the ground of despondency and inactivity is entirely removed; a worthy emulation is excited; and we ourselves are not only prompted, but encouraged, to excell.

As for the example which the text speaks of, and which christianity has called us to imitate, it is by far the most high and noble that was ever proposed to the world. And it contains more ample instruction in it than any other, and is adapted to all ranks and stations in human life, as it abounds both with common and universal, and with more extraordinary and heroic virtues; it is an example of unspotted innocence, and therefore, when rightly understood, an unerring and invariable rule: and finally it is an example that is peculiarly persuasive, calculated to impress our minds, and determine and influence our conduct; being that of the author of our religion, of our amiable and compassionate Saviour, of the greatest benefactor and friend to mankind. We ought therefore, though we can never hope to conform perfectly to it, to aim at as near a resemblance of it as is possible, from e-

very motive of decency, gratitude, and intereſt.

But then, on the other hand, it muſt be remembered, that there are certain general rules neceſſary to be obſerved in the imitation of all examples; and eſpecially of ſuch as tranſcend common life, and are adorned and heightened by great and extraordinary actions. It is abſolutely neceſſary, in the firſt place, in order to our forming a juſt eſtimate of particular actions, that we carefully examine into the true ſprings and occaſions of them, and conſider the ſituation and character of the agent, and the views and motives by which he was directed and governed; becauſe without this it is impoſſible for us to know, in ſeveral caſes at leaſt, whether they actually deſerve and demand our imitation, or, indeed, whether they are right and fit in themſelves. The very ſame inſtances of outward conduct, as they are differently circumſtanced, and flow from different principles, may be either eminently wiſe, or as notoriouſly abſurd; moral, or irregular; proofs of a rational and ſober piety, or marks of a heated and blind enthuſiaſm. And, therefore, unleſs this

point be fixed with a tolerable degree of exactneſs and good judgment, we may happen entirely to deſert, or, however, widely to vary from, the pattern which we pretend moſt ſtrictly to copy after, even when the external behaviour is, in both, the ſame.

From hence we are naturally led to another rule, and that is, that in following examples which are propoſed to us, and moſt of all diſtinguiſhed and ſingular examples, we endeavour to find out thoſe parts which are more immediately adapted to our own condition, to our abilities, rank, and employments, and the relative ſtations, in which the all-wiſe Providence of the ſupreme diſpoſing Mind has thought fit to place us. The habit and temper of piety, of generoſity, of benevolence and mercy, may be imitable in all examples, be they ever ſo great and excellent; but it is obvious to the common ſenſe and experience of mankind, that there are ſome acts of piety, ſome expreſſions of benevolence, ſome diſcoveries and proofs of a generous and merciful diſpoſition, that cannot be univerſally imitated; ſo that the inward, that is, the true and proper, cha-

racter may be one and the ſame; even when there is a neceſſity, in the nature of things, that it ſhould ſhew itſelf in very different inſtances. And this can never appear in a ſtronger light, than by applying it to the moſt holy and finiſhed example of the bleſſed Author of our religion. To endeavour to be like him in a conſtant and ardent propenſity to do good, and in a life of the moſt exalted and extenſive uſefulneſs, is the eternal duty of all his diſciples; but to perform preciſely the ſame beneficent actions, to communicate relief and happineſs, to reform the errors and vices of the world, in the ſame extraordinary way in which he did it, theſe things can conſtitute no part of our moral obligations, becauſe they are in our preſent circumſtances abſolutely impoſſible. And in many other caſes, unleſs we take care to maintain the like juſt diſtinction, and by that means, acquire a right notion of what it is we are obliged to copy, in the pious and moral example of our Saviour, our religion muſt run into extravagance; and our virtues inſtead of being reaſonable and attractive, will be juſtly cenſured as abſurd and unnatural affectation.

I ſhall

I ſhall only add one preliminary obſervation more, which is this, that the moſt bright and juſtly celebrated examples of virtue are likely to make the moſt ſenſible and deep impreſſion, when they are diſtinctly illuſtrated. The general excellence of the whole character taken together, may appear great and admirable; but our eſteem and veneration of it will of courſe increaſe and be better eſtabliſhed, when we ſee it repreſented in a variety of agreeable lights; and the uſes of it will be accommodated, with leſs danger of error and greater eaſe, to the various ſcenes and conditions of human life. For as in our inquiries into the works of nature, the farther we go in unravelling the curious texture of their parts, their properties and uſes, their ſtupendous form as branches of the general ſyſtem, their connection with and dependence on each other, and ſubſerviency to the common grand deſign of order, harmony, and the communication of happineſs; as the more exact we are in theſe inquiries, our wonder and delight are greatly heightened, and the more enlarged ideas we have of the exquiſite conſtitution of the univerſe, and

the boundleſs perfection of its infinite Author: ſo it is likewiſe with reſpect to moral examples. The conſideration of their general propriety and rectitude is but an inadequate and ſuperficial view, in compariſon of that which muſt be opened to us, by a diſtinct diſplay of their particular beauties and excellencies. I ſhall therefore purſue this method in this and the following diſcourſe, and endeavour to delineate the ſeveral perfections, that were eminently exemplified in the life of Chriſt; not preſuming that I ſhall be able to do ſtrict juſtice to the fair and unſpotted original; but hoping, however, to give ſuch a tranſcript of it, as may be adapted to warm our more refined and generous affections, to inſpire an honourable opinion of Chriſt and his religion, a love of virtue for its intrinſic divine excellence, and more vigorous reſolutions to improve in it.

The firſt thing, that I ſhall propoſe, is the example of our bleſſed Saviour's piety; which was indeed ſublime and fervent, but yet, in all the expreſſions of it, diſcreet and temperate; being founded in reaſon and the immutable law of all derived and dependent natures,

tures, and entirely regulated and guided by it. I chuſe to begin with this, becauſe it ſhone ſo brightly, and with ſuch a ſuperior and excelling luſtre, in the life of Chriſt, and appears to have been, as it were, the vital and animating principle throughout his whole character; and becauſe it is, in itſelf, the firſt and ſupreme obligation incumbent on mankind, and on all intelligent and moral creatures. In the opinion of many indeed, who would be ranked with the moſt diſcerning, piety ſeems not to be a neceſſary ingredient in great and exemplary characters. In ſome of the moſt applauded, eſpecially in modern times, there are found but few and ſlight traces of it. And yet I can, I think, ſcarce conceive of any truth, that is more demonſtrable and obvious to human reaſon than this, that there can be no ſuch thing as a ſtrictly moral, and ſurely then not a finiſhed character, while the duties of piety are entirely neglected. It may indeed have a partial dignity, and be juſtly celebrated for its other diſtinguiſhed and uſeful qualities; but the want of this is ſo fundamental a defect, that it muſt, at leaſt, tarniſh and obſcure all the

the reſt of its boaſted excellencies. For is it natural to the mind of man to acknowledge and honour real merit, and can it refuſe to adore infinite rectitude? Can it ſincerely admire lower characters of virtue, and not be charmed with that of the beſt of all Beings? Can it love, and be ſtruck with, a confined and defective goodneſs, and not find its contemplations raiſed, and its affections warmly excited, by a goodneſs that is unbounded and immutable? Can it approve of gratitude, and not be grateful to the eternal ſource of mercy? Such a conduct as this muſt fail in eſſential points; and has neither fitneſs nor conſiſtency to recommend it. For the duties of piety are, properly ſpeaking, nothing elſe but the exerciſe of reſpect, love, and gratitude to the Supreme Being; which, if they are moral and unalterable obligations with reſpect to our fellow-creatures, muſt deſerve, much more, to be improved and cultivated with reſpect to Him, who is the gracious and univerſal Creator. This therefore is the natural, the indubitable, concluſion from the whole—that it is altogether as impoſſible, in reaſon, that there ſhould ever

ever be a truly noble and complete character without lively sentiments of devotion and piety towards God; as it is that any character should be amiable, without justice, clemency, and generosity to men.

But both these, which are in the nature of things inseparably linked together, were illustriously displayed in our blessed Saviour's example: and it was this union, and admirable harmony, of all the moral virtues, which give it such a transcendent and incomparable glory, that all other examples sink and fade before it. This perfect pattern of all moral rectitude ever maintained and cultivated the most raised and honourable apprehensions of God, and lived in an habitual reverence of his underived and independent glory and majesty, his boundless dominion, his supreme authority; and under an efficacious and invigorating sense of his own constant dependence upon him. The piety of the Saviour of the world was free and generous; not a homage paid to a tyrant, but to the Father and Friend of mankind. It appears to have been a steady and uniform principle, from all his discourses;

courſes; from his frequent occaſional addreſſes to the Deity in prayer and praiſe; as well as from his more uncommon and intenſe devotions. He gave continual and daily proofs of an ardent zeal for the honour of God; or, in other words, for promoting the right knowledge of his perfections and laws, and an exact and univerſal reſemblance of him. He thought it his "meat to do the will of him that ſent him" into the world, "and to finiſh his work;" that is, it was the refreſhment, the delight, of his mind, infinitely ſuperior to the falſe adulterated gratifications of ſenſual exceſs and luxury, to ſupport honourably his place and rank in the univerſe, and execute the orders of Infinite Wiſdom. And being convinced, that it was neceſſarily determined by the beſt and moſt important reaſons, he ever preſerved that calm, humble, and ſublimely rational temper as to be able to ſay, I not only eſteem myſelf conſtrained by the duty which I owe to a ſuperior, but I "delight to do thy will, O my God." A very illuſtrious inſtance of his command over mutinous and rebellious paſſions, we find in the laſt and moſt diſtreſsful

ſcene

ſcene of his life. For though nature was ſhocked, and expreſſed a ſtrong reluctance, at the proſpect of undeſerved ſcorn and indignity, and of the ſhame, tortures, and horrors of a violent and ignominious death, yet he ſtill preſerved his conſtancy, and invincible temper of reſignation: "O my Father," ſays he, "if it be poſſible, let this cup paſs from "me; nevertheleſs, not as I will, but as "thou wilt."

Moreover; The religious example, which Chriſt has in our own nature propoſed, and ſet before us, is an eaſy and imitable example, free from unnatural and extravagant raptures and tranſports. It does not conſiſt in mechanical impulſes and variable fervors of devotion; in ſuperſtitious auſterities and enthuſiaſtical viſions and intercourſes with God; but in worſhipping the Father of the univerſe "in ſpirit and in truth," with an enlightened underſtanding, and a ſerene and purified conſcience. The fruits of it were, zeal regulated by knowledge, and tempered with humanity and compaſſion; the practice of virtue in all its branches; humility, contentment, ſobriety, the love of mankind, and a delight in doing good.

It

It was not reſerved and unſociable, but familiar and affable; and aimed at this as its ultimate end; to promote the glory of the infinite Creator by the moral rectitude, the private and public, the preſent and eternal happineſs, of his intelligent, which are the nobleſt of, his creatures.

Laſtly; The Author of our religion, while he converſed with men here on earth, was not only conſtant, at all fit ſeaſons, in meditation and private prayer; but regularly and ſeriouſly attended the ſolemn offices of public devotion; and particularly it was, in his opinion, an eſſential proof of the reſpect due to Almighty God, to acknowledge his authority in the appointment of poſitive laws, as well as by a ſtrict obſervance of thoſe which are unchangeable and moral. It was upon this principle, that he thought himſelf obliged to ſubmit to John's baptiſm. And therefore when John made a ſcruple of performing the office of baptiſm for one who was advanced ſo vaſtly above him; the Son of God, notwithſtanding his ſuperior character and the conſummate rectitude of his nature, would not be diverted from diſcharging an obligation which

which he thought indiſpenſably incumbent on him: "For thus," ſays he, "it becometh us to fulfil all righteouſneſs."

And what excuſes, now, that are plauſible, and carry the leaſt diſtant colour of reaſon, can any of us invent, for depreciating and neglecting laws of the very ſame kind under the Chriſtian inſtitution, with that which our Lord himſelf ſo remarkably honoured, and hath in ſo forcible a manner recommended to our eſteem and veneration, by his own example? We ſhall not, ſurely, pretend, that the holy rites of our religion are ſigns and emblems, that can be of no uſe but to the vulgar, the weakneſs of whoſe reaſon muſt be aided, and their affections raiſed, by ſenſible images; but that we are too wiſe, and our notions of things too juſt and refined, to receive any real improvement from ſuch debaſed and popular ordinances; we ſhall not think it decent to make this pretence, when we have his example and authority both directly againſt us, who was the Wiſdom of God. What then ſhall we offer? Is it this; that we are already ſo far advanced and confirmed in virtue as to ſtand in need of no external helps?

Certain

Certain it is, that in such cases, our partiality and pride may easily deceive us; upon which account, it is our wisdom to be more cautious and diffident. But not to insist on this; it is evident to the very lowest understanding, that what is here suggested is a frivolous and insufficient plea, since the Saviour of the world did not think it to have any weight in his own case, though he was perfectly innocent. On the contrary, he looked upon an act of obedience, even to a positive law, to be absolutely necessary to complete his moral character; necessary to maintain a becoming respect to the authority of God; necessary as an example to instruct and influence others; and highly necessary to prevent contempt from being thrown on any one of the divine laws, which, by a too easy transition, would devolve upon all the rest.

In this, as well as in every other instance of religious obedience, let us then "follow his steps," who, to this end, hath "left us an example"—The excellence of which will be farther illustrated in the next discourse.

SER-

SERMON VIII.

ON THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST.

1 PETER II. 21.

Leaving us an example, that ye ſhould follow his ſteps.

PIETY, and univerſal virtue, or good morality, are, by the natural connexion and order of things, abſolutely inſeparable. For all the rules of moral goodneſs being eternal laws of God, and many of them tranſcribed, as it were

were, from his own eſſential perfections; the allowed and habitual neglect of any of them muſt, of neceſſity, be inconſiſtent both with the juſt eſteem of his lovely and excellent character, and with a ſincere regard and ſubmiſſion to his authority. But of all the moral virtues, there is none more intimately connected with the genuine ſpirit and proper duties of piety, than univerſal benevolence and mercy. For if we reverence the authority of God, this hath enjoined and enforced it upon us; if we honour his example, in this we find it moſt amiably and glorioufly diſplayed; the nature, which he has given us, ſtrongly inclines and prompts us to it; and his creatures, whoſe happineſs he ſincerely deſires, are the objects of it.

From the conſideration of our Saviour's piety, we therefore, naturally proceed to contemplate his benevolence, his lively and unconquerable benevolence. This is the virtue, that above any other, conſtitutes lovelineſs of character; and it is withal, the inſeparable companion of true greatneſs of mind. And, with reſpect to this generous and God-like virtue, the example of Chriſt deſerves a very

very particular attention, and to be admired and celebrated with the higheſt applauſe. It may be extremely ſerviceable for our direction, as to the excellent nature, the great importance, the immutable neceſſity of univerſal love and charity: it may likewiſe be peculiarly ſerviceable to warm and animate every kind and friendly affection, that nature hath implanted within us; to extirpate all the ſeeds of baſe and ſelfiſh paſſions; to inſpire a diſintereſted, ſteady, diffuſive, goodneſs; and generous unextinguiſhable ardour and delight in beneficent actions.

If we review the particulars of our bleſſed Saviour's benevolence, we ſhall find it to be, in all, noble and truly divine. To do good was the conſtant employment, the principal buſineſs, of his life. His very retirements, his meditations, his prayers were in a great meaſure devoted to the moſt ſubſtantial happineſs of mankind: but his public converſe, with the world, was almoſt one entire ſcene of kind and uſeful offices. Wherever he appeared, eaſe and joy were his conſtant attendants. He recovered ſpeech to the dumb, ſight to the blind, the calm and regular uſe of reaſon to the diſtem-

diſtempered in mind; reſtored thoſe to the privileges of ſocial creatures, who for foul and loathſome diſeaſes, were excluded from human ſociety; and relieved the ſorrows of tender parents and affectionate relatives, by miraculouſly raiſing their children and friends from the dead. In a word, the far greater part even of his extraordinary operations were, like the fixed and conſtant temper and habit of his mind, friendly to all objects that preſented themſelves, and ſcattered the bleſſings of health and peace all around him. But great and godlike as all this may appear, the benevolence of Chriſt had a far nobler aim, and took a much wider and more extended ſcope. His chief view was to inſtruct the ignorant, and reform the erroneous and vicious, to eſtabliſh truth, and promote univerſal virtue and rectitude of life; and, conſequently, to advance the ſupreme honour and endleſs felicity of reaſonable beings. For this he underwent innumerable fatigues; with a view to this he directed all his ſtudies, and was fearleſs of reproach or danger; and at laſt, the more effectually to accompliſh this high and grand deſign, he freely, and with an heroic

roic greatneſs of mind, conſented to ſubmit to death. So that he may be properly ſaid to have died a martyr for the univerſal good, the ſupreme and everlaſting good of mankind; and thus, his benevolence which in the former parts of his life, no difficulties could controul, no ingratitude reſtrain, no injuries diſcourage, was elevated to its utmoſt pitch of perfection by triumphing over the ignominy and terror of death.

And as the moſt humane and nobly benevolent hearts, have always been diſtinguiſhed by a ſtrong ſenſe of compaſſion, ſo we find it in the life of Chriſt; in which this tender and generous virtue was moſt admirably diſplayed. It is the property of little and contracted minds to be hard and inſenſible; but great ſpirits eaſily melt, and relent at the diſtreſſes of their fellow-creatures. To be ſoftened by benevolent affections, and diſſolved in pity, is an honour to the human mind, but to be diſſolved by the effeminate pleaſures of luxury is mere animal paſſion, that depreſſes reaſon and the moral faculties. The latter of theſe therefore, could find no place in the perfect example of the Son of God; but the former

was gloriouſly diſplayed, and ſhone in its utmoſt luſtre. Compaſſion was ſo natural to his elevated and divine temper, that the moſt common incidents of life were ſufficient to raiſe a ſtrong and lively ſenſe of it. And it exerted itſelf towards his moſt determined and inveterate enemies. For when a little before the deſtruction of that blinded and ungrateful city, he beheld Jeruſalem at a diſtance, we are informed by the ſacred hiſtorian, that with the moſt ſenſible and deep concern he deplored her unhappy fate, and the deſolation that would ſhortly be brought upon her by the Roman arms, as a puniſhment of her unbelief and impenitence.

Add to all this, that we may find, in the life of Chriſt, a bright example of the tendereſt affection and ſympathy of friendſhip. For when the relations and friends of Lazarus were lamenting, and in ſore affliction, at his death, his ſoul immediately took the impreſſion of their grief, and Jeſus wept; Jeſus wept, though he knew their loſs would ſoon be repaired, and though he came determined to repair it by his miraculous power. Jeſus therefore wept not for the death of Lazarus;

Lazarus; but from a mind ſtrongly ſuſceptible of compaſſion, and that naturally bore a part in the ſighs and complaints of the afflicted. From whence we learn, that the ſoft heart which eaſily relents, and the tear of commiſeration that kindly falls for the diſtreſſes of others, is one of the moſt infallible indications of a ſublime and great ſpirit, and an ornament to the moſt exalted characters. There is indeed ſuch an inward ſatisfaction, ſuch a conſciousneſs of true dignity attending it, as is not to be deſcribed. From pains of this kind ſprings one of the nobleſt of all our pleaſures: ſo wiſely and graciouſly has the God of nature ordained it, that the compunction and uneaſineſs, which we feel from ſo generous a principle, ſhould not be unmixed ſorrow; but be accompanied with inward approbation and end in joy: that whilſt it is in its conſequences ſo highly beneficial to our fellow-creatures, we ourſelves might not be the only ſufferers by it; nor conſequently be tempted to diſcourage or reſiſt that implanted ſenſe of humanity, which is the orphan's hope, and the refuge of the poor and miſerable.

But to proceed: another excellent property of that benevolence and goodneſs, which ſo illuſtriouſly diſtinguiſhed the life of Chriſt, is, that it was calm, gentle, and forgiving. It could not be irritated by any provocations, to a deſire of revenge, nor be prevailed upon, by the moſt groſs and undeſerved indignities, to attempt a retaliation; but preſerved an entire command over all reſentful and boiſterous paſſions, and ardently deſired the happineſs of the enemy and the perſecutor, whilſt it ſuffered by their malice. It was a conſtant maxim with the Son of God, to triumph over the inſolence and injuſtice of his oppreſſors by an uninterrupted courſe of good offices; and conquer his enemies, not by force, but by meekneſs, compaſſion, and generoſity. "He "was brought as a lamb to the ſlaughter, "and as a ſheep before her ſhearers is "dumb, ſo he opened not his mouth: "when he was reviled, he reviled not "again; when he ſuffered, he threatned "not; but committed himſelf to him "that judgeth righteouſly." And this branch of his example is, for its extraordinary amiableneſs and dignity, particularly recommended by the Apoſtle Peter,

ter, just after the words of my text, to the strict imitation of all christians. And surely, with the highest reason; because it discovers such a freedom and greatness of mind, such an established virtue, such a steady and insuppressible benevolence of temper, as are never found but in the most raised and God-like characters.

But the excellency and uncommon lustre of our blessed Saviour's example, in this respect, will appear in a yet stronger light to excite our esteem and admiration, if we turn our thoughts to particular instances. We shall then find, that the mild and charitable Author of our religion was a declared enemy to persecution, and to all methods of severity and violence, though upon the most plausible and specious pretences. For when two of his disciples, transported by a frantic and cruel zeal, proposed to him to command "fire from heaven" to destroy the rude and ungenerous Samaritans, who refused him a passage through one of their villages, for no other reason but because he was going to Jerusalem; and who, besides the affront which they offered to him, and their contempt of his prophetic character, were notorious

apoſtates from the true religion, that was revealed and inſtituted by God himſelf: when two of his diſciples propoſed his revenging himſelf in ſo ſignal a manner on theſe inhoſpitable, ſchiſmatical, and apoſtate Samaritans; he rejected the motion with a noble reſentment, and a ſevere rebuke of their intemperate zeal, in theſe remarkable words: "Ye "know not what manner of ſpirit ye "are of: for the Son of man is not come "to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them." To injure any on account of their diſreſpect to him, and for the ſake of their errors and corruptions in faith or worſhip, was abſolutely repugnant to the genius of his religion, and to the uniform courſe of his meek and beneficent life.

Farther; Let us view the Friend and Saviour of mankind, when moſt heinouſly inſulted, and under the moſt grievous ſcenes of his diſtreſs and ſuffering, and we ſhall find that the ſame ſweetneſs of diſpoſition, the ſame unruffled ſpirit of ſoft and mild benevolence ſtill poſſeſſed him, and triumphed compleatly and glorioufly over proud and malignant paſſions. We all of us feel, that when our honour is ſtained by the rude attacks

of

of calumny, when we are unjustly despised, and suffer groundless abuse and wrong, through the baseness and ingratitude of the world; it is extremely difficult, and an excellence that few, very few, can attain, to preserve the evenness and composure of our tempers. Passion is apt to grow unruly, and inspire designs of revenge; and in the midst of this tumult within, the voice of reason is not heard, and the motions of benevolence are scarcely felt. But if we would accustom ourselves to contemplate, frequently, the example of the Son of God with a becoming seriousness and veneration, this would be a most effectual means to extirpate all the seeds of malice and ungoverned resentment; and while we abhorred the injury, it would teach us to maintain humanity and tenderness towards the injurious. For this divine person had led an innocent, peaceable, and inoffensive life; he was conscious to himself of no views, but what directly tended to the good of mankind; he never gave to any one of his countrymen the least ground for just complaint; but for his exemplary services to the world deserved universal love and honour. But when, not-

withſtanding all this, he was branded with public infamy, apprehended as a notorious malefactor, and his life ſacrificed to ſave that of a vile deteſtable murderer; when the prieſts and leading men of the Jewiſh nation made it an act of religion, and a point of eminent merit, to conſpire and procure his death; when he was expoſed, with mock-pageantry, to the deriſion and rage of the multitude; and after many preparatory indignities, was at length to glut the inſatiate cruelty of his enemies, devoted to death, even the death of ſlaves and of the worſt of criminals: do we find, under all theſe unparalleled provocations, that his meekneſs and univerſal benevolence deſerted him, and gave him up a prey to anger and impatience? Was there ſo much as one expreſſion dropt from him, which ſavoured in the leaſt of fierceneſs and inhumanity? Did he diſcover the leaſt tincture of an implacable and forgiving ſpirit? His friends will not blaſpheme his character ſo much, as to caſt ſuch a diſhonourable imputation upon him; and, in this particular, his very enemies muſt be aſhamed to defame him. For his paſſions were entirely calm, his commiſeration

was

was ſtrong and lively, and his generoſity unconquerable throughout the whole courſe of his ſufferings. He reſented, with a lively feeling of humanity, every thing that had the appearance of cruelty, even againſt thoſe that ſought his life; and therefore miraculouſly healed "the high-prieſt's ſervant," ſent to apprehend him, whom one of his diſciples had wounded: and he died gloriouſly, praying for his perſecutors; and as a proof of the nobleſt benevolence, and a perfectly ſerene and undiſturbed mind, urging the only circumſtance, that could be thought of, in extenuation of their guilt. This remarkable prayer is recorded by St. Luke, in theſe words; which will doubtleſs be remembered to the everlaſting honour of our Saviour's example; "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

We read indeed, ſometimes, of his giving ſevere and reproachful names to perſons eminent, and diſtinguiſhed by their wickedneſs: but this is conſiſtent with the utmoſt meekneſs and compoſure of ſpirit, whenever it is neceſſary, as it then was, to expoſe popular vices; hypocriſy and malice, under the maſk of

devotion: and craft, rapaciousness, and oppression, screened and recommended by their appearing in high characters. Our Lord's censures were only just reproofs, seasonable protests against flagrant immoralities; and from which, as he appeared in the sublime character of the Messenger and Prophet of God, no considerations of prudence, complaisance, or decency, could be sufficient, in reason, to restrain him. For his office was to rebuke sin impartially; and the extraordinary credentials, which he brought from heaven, would support and justify him in detecting and shaming vice wherever he found it, even in the most sacred and exalted stations. The weight and authority of his own mission, and the virtue and happiness of the world, both demanded it.

And when in some passages of the New Testament, anger is ascribed to Christ; it never denotes that wild and extravagant passion, those transports of rage, that confusion and perturbation of thought, that thirst after revenge and blood, which are too usual marks of anger in precipitate and ungoverned tempers, and drive humanity and mercy from the

the heart: it was nothing more than a generous indignation against sin. His resentment was not levelled at the person of the offender; but at his dissimulation, perfidiousness, cruelty, and other crimes, which are justly and highly offensive to the wise and virtuous. We are therefore expressly told, that while he looked round about on the pharisees with anger, he was grieved "for the hardness of their hearts:" his soul was at the same time open to kind impressions, and he generously pitied their unhappy depravity. So that our blessed Saviour's benevolence was as incapable of being obscured by violent and disordered passions; as it was of being lessened by injuries, or discouraged by the fear of death.

And as this excellent virtue was in the character of Christ calm, mild, and forgiving; it was also humble and condescending. The everlasting good of mankind was the ultimate end he had in view; to accomplish this end, the Son of God submitted to lead a life of poverty, affliction and disgrace, and closed the scene of his humiliation by a violent and ignominious death. This astonishing instance of condescension, speaks to Christians.

tians of every degree and character this language: "Look not every one on "your own things, but every man alſo "on the things of others; let this mind "be in you, which was alſo in Chriſt "Jeſus." Let the example of his divine condeſcenſion, if you have merely a regard to decency of character, ſhame you out of your pride and haughtineſs; and teach you to know your nature, and your duty, better, than to think it any diſparagement to your brighteſt accompliſhments, or the higheſt worldly honours, to practiſe the neceſſary humilities of true goodneſs; to conſult and labour, and ſacrifice popularity, grandeur, nay life itſelf, for the proſperity and welfare of your fellow-creatures. For the inflexible temper of pride, and a diſdainful treatment of your inferior brethren, are not more unſuitable to human nature, and the reaſon of things, than they are a direct contradiction to the ſpirit of chriſtianity, and to the conduct of its Author; who himſelf ſays, "take my "yoke upon you, and learn of me: for "I am meek and lowly in heart."

During the whole time of his public miniſtry, he was peculiarly remarkable, for

for a frank and obliging humanity of behaviour, to all who had the honour to converſe with him. He lived both with his friends, and carried himſelf towards ſtrangers, with an open generous familiarity; was eaſy of acceſs; and ready to communicate inſtruction and relief to every fit and worthy object. He was of a modeſt unaſpiring temper, and induſtriouſly ſhunned grandeur and oſtentation; avoiding company, and chuſing ſolitude, when the people infatuated by their expectations of the temporal reign of the Meſſiah, would have taken him by force to make him a king. And from this humble diſpoſition, ſprang that contentment and entire tranquillity of mind, which he always expreſſed in low and deſpiſed circumſtances: as his being placed in ſuch circumſtances ſuggeſts another very important reaſon (beſides the force of his example) for the practice of theſe virtues, by giving us an undeniable demonſtration, that contempt and poverty are no marks of the anger and diſpleaſure of heaven, ſince they were the lot of him who was perfectly innocent, and the beloved Son of God.

To

To all these excellent and useful virtues was added, in the life and example of Christ, an unconstained and inviolable integrity; not rash, and incautious, and courting dangers unnecessarily; but guided by a just discretion, and yet steady and inflexible. In his doctrine, he so far consulted the prejudices of his hearers, as to open and enlarge their minds by degrees. He avoided the persecutions of his enemies, and the effects of their implacable malice, when he could do it with honour and a good conscience. But he never used any arts to deceive them into wrong meanings; never, by studied ambiguities of speech, flattered and confirmed them in their errors. He opposed corruption and vice, however universal and fashionable, however distinguished and dignified; and at last bravely died in maintaining his own integrity, and for the cause of truth and virtue, which are the cause of God and man.

Such are the great lines of the excellent and divine example of our Saviour Jesus Christ. I shall only add, that our profession and character, as christians, oblige us to make this example as far as it has now been exhibited (and in all the other

other branches of it, in which it is capable of being imitated) the model of our own lives: or, in the language of St. John, that every one that abideth in Christ, "ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."

SER-

SERMON IX.

ON LIVING PEACEABLY.

ROMANS XII. 18.

If it be poſſible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

THERE are many excellent precepts and rules of duty laid together by the Apoſtle towards the end of this chapter; but none of greater moment to be earneſtly inculcated upon Chriſtians, and duly obſerved, than this which I have choſen for the ſubject of the preſent diſcourſe.

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As to the nature of the precept here given of "living peaceably," I need not uſe many words to tell you what it is; it is eaſily and univerſally underſtood. Would to God, it were but as univerſally practiſed! and then ſuch exhortations as theſe would be needleſs. But though an account of the duty may not be requiſite, to inform even the meaneſt and moſt ignorant Chriſtian, yet it may be of uſe to bring to his mind what he already knows, and to awaken in him ſtrong and lively impreſſions of it: and to that end, I ſhall in a very brief and plain manner deſcribe it.

To "live peaceably," is ſo to demean ourſelves in all the offices and ſtations of life, as to promote a friendly underſtanding and correſpondence among thoſe we converſe with; ſo as to prevent, as much as we can, all outward contention and ſtrife, nay, all inward miſtakes and jealouſies from ariſing, and to quench and allay them as ſoon as we can, whenever they are riſen; ſo, as to diſagree openly with no man in things of an indifferent nature, and of no moment; and, where the point is of importance enough to deſerve to be inſiſted on, there to do it, with

with ſo much candor, and modeſty, and ſweetneſs, as not to offend even thoſe we do not agree with. In a word, it is ſo to conduct our actions, diſcourſes, and dealings, as to make ourſelves and others as eaſy as is poſſible. Various are the inſtances of this duty; ſome influencing our behaviour with reſpect to the public, ſome regarding our conduct towards private men.

They "live peaceably" with reſpect to the public, who pay a due regard to the laws of their country, and expreſs a due reverence towards their ſuperiors; honouring them ſincerely, obeying them ſubmiſſively; not raſhly cenſuring their actions, but putting the beſt and moſt candid conſtruction upon them; not being over buſy in matters that are too high for them, and do not concern them.

They "live peaceably" in matters of common life and daily practice, who take care to make their carriage inoffenſive and obliging; who are not ready to entertain ill reports of men, much leſs to diſperſe them; who whiſper about nothing to ſet friends and neighbours at variance; who mind their own buſineſs, without intermeddling

meddling much in the concerns of others; who can take a ſlight affront or injury in converſation without reſenting it, and even a great one without returning it.

But I forbear to give any further deſcription of ſo known a duty; and go on to conſider the extent of it. It muſt be practiſed towards "all men:" not only towards thoſe who are on good terms with us, but towards thoſe who are not; not only to the good-natured and candid, but even to the captious and the froward. For, as our Saviour argues in a like caſe, if you live peaceably with them only, who live peaceably with you, "what "thank have you? Do not even ſinners "the ſame?" The worſt, and worſt natured men will go thus far: for there is no temptation to break peace with thoſe who live inoffenſively with us, no room for contention with the mild and complying; the trial of our temper is, when ſhocking accidents happen to us, when ill words are given us; when we are touched in point of intereſt and honour; or in any other reſpect drawn into a diſpute, and forced to engage: then, to bear oppoſition meekly, to ward off the anger of our adverſaries by a diſcreet and

and dextrous addreſs; to keep ourſelves free from the contagion of that paſſion and that reſentment which reigns in them, or free at leaſt from the outward and viſible ſigns of it; this is no vulgar attainment, but a very great pitch of chriſtian perfection. And the Apoſtle therefore, at the very time he is giving the precept, acknowledges the great difficulty that there is ſometimes in obeying it: "If it be poſſible," ſays he, and "as much as in you lies;" intimating, that in reſpect of ſome natures, and in ſome circumſtances, it is ſcarce poſſible, though we do whatever in us lies, to come up to it.

To "live peaceably with all men," in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of the words, is a thing abſolutely impoſſible, and out of our reach; for it depends on what we are not maſters of, the diſpoſitions and paſſions of other men. Let us take what care we can to prevent miſtakes, they will ſometimes ariſe; let us with ever ſo much caution avoid doing injuries, we cannot always avoid receiving them; ſome churliſh and ſavage natures there are that delight in outrages, and are moved with no condeſcenſions, no compliances; "ſuch

"such sons of Belial," as was said of Nabal, "that a man cannot speak to them." Where violent incroachments are made upon our fortune or good name, we not only may, but must vindicate ourselves from them, though breach of peace, and an open rupture with any man attend our doing it. Slight affronts, and small acts of injustice we may put up with; but where we are wounded to the quick, either in our estate, or reputation, we are not at liberty to be silent: to be upon our defence in such cases, is a debt we owe to ourselves, our posterity, our relations, and friends, who have all an interest in us.

However, in all these cases, where we lay aside peace for a more valuable end, we are bound to have an eye to it, even while we seem to overlook it; and must so break with men on such occasions, as to leave room, and to prepare the way for a reconciliation. War itself has its rules and restraints, within which its savage cruelties are bounded: much more must the measures of our resentment, in such breaches as these, be tempered with great humanity and great prudence. We must recover our right, and wipe off aspersions without rancour or revenge; our

our reſentments muſt never ſo far tranſport us, as to make us ſay any thing of any man, but what our cauſe and his character will juſtify; nor endeavour to inſpire people with worſe opinions concerning him, than we in our conſciences believe he deſerves. And to preſerve ourſelves thus far upon our guard, when we are engaged in a quarrel, is a much harder taſk than not to engage at all; and will require our calling in to our aid all the pious helps and expedients, with which reaſon and religion will furniſh us; and which therefore I ſhall now point out to you.

The riſe of moſt of our diſquiets and diſcords is, from the tumultuous and diſorderly motions of our paſſions; and theſe therefore muſt be well regulated, eſpecially that fierce and boiſterous paſſion of anger, which diſcovers itſelf the earlieſt, and is tamed the lateſt of any; and is, of all others, the greateſt enemy of our repoſe. This therefore, and the reſt, muſt be brought under the diſcipline and government of reaſon, if we ever hope to be eaſy to ourſelves or other men; and indeed, unleſs we are firſt eaſy to ourſelves, it is impoſſible we

ſhould

ſhould ever be ſo to others. We may as well expect perpetual ſunſhine in climates ſubject to ſtorms and hurricanes, as that there ſhould be a laſting peace in that breaſt, where paſſions are allowed to reign.

The next plain help towards "living peaceably," is, if we moderate our deſires, and contract our deſigns, with regard to the good things of life, contenting ourſelves with ſuch a ſhare of them, as anſwers all the good ends of living, and not eagerly graſping after more than would be of real uſe to us, if we had it: the wants and conveniences of nature are known, and certain, and ſoon ſupplied; but imaginary wants are infinite and endleſs; and he that has ſet his heart upon them, will find it very difficult ever to recall it. He is got beyond reaſon in his deſire, and will probably decline no unreaſonable method of obtaining it. And the natural iſſue of this muſt be perpetual feuds and bickerings, contentions and ſtruggles; for our deſires will meet thoſe of other men, as eager as our own, and as impatient of being reſiſted. "From whence come wars and fightings?" ſays St. James,

"Come

" Come they not hence, even of your luſts?" that is, from your covetous deſires; for ſo it follows: " Ye luſt, and " have not; ye kill, and deſire to have, " and cannot obtain."

A third rule in this caſe, is to have a watchful eye upon ourſelves, in our firſt entrance upon any debate or conteſt; and at that time to be ſure to keep the reins cloſely in our hands, when there is the moſt danger in giving a looſe to them; and they are the moſt eaſily manageable. For let us but indulge ourſelves a little in the firſt motions of warmth and reſentment, and by inſenſible ſteps and degrees we may be wrought up at laſt into all the height of madneſs and folly. The beginning of ſtrife (ſaith the wiſe man) is as when one letteth out water. When the bank is once broken down, we do not know how far it may flow, or how deep a ſpace it may fill.

To this we may add a particular vigilance over ourſelves with regard to the intemperance of the tongue, that " mem- " ber which ſetteth on fire the courſe of " nature, and is itſelf ſet on fire of hell." We muſt reſtrain it in every reſpect, but eſpecially in relation to that natural

proneneſs it has towards publiſhing the faults of others; which ought never to be done, but with the utmoſt caution and tenderneſs. We can never ſtrictly juſtify ourſelves in ſpeaking evil of any man, though that evil ſhould be true, but when either the ſeal of friendſhip binds up the diſcourſe, or the rules of charity and juſtice require us ſo to do. The ſon of Sirach ſeems to carry this matter very far: "Whether it be to friend or foe," ſays he, "talk not of o-"ther men's lives, and, if thou canſt "without offence, reveal them not;" which ſeems to bar us from ſpreading an ill report of any man, but when we are under an abſolute neceſſity of doing it. He that governs himſelf conſtantly by this rule, takes one of the ſureſt and moſt promiſing ſteps towards "living peaceably with all men."

Eſpecially if he keeps himſelf always from embarking in parties and factions, and falling in with vehemence into all the intereſts and deſigns of them. This will neceſſarily in time imbitter his ſpirit, and ſour his humour, make him like and diſlike men implicity, and lead him into

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many resentments, which he has nothing to do with.

Again; Let a man that desires to pass through this world inoffensively, resolve to be very diligent in his particular profession and calling; and if he has none, to make one to himself, by some proper and suitable employment. He that is employed, has no leisure to move in the little disputes and quarrels which trouble the peace of the world, and which are chiefly kept up and tost to and fro by those who have nothing else to do. The Apostle therefore, we may observe, in his exhortation joins "studying to be quiet," with the "doing our own business," as if the one was a natural and inseparable attendant on the other.

Above all, let him add fervent and unwearied prayer to the blessed Author of peace, and Lover of concord, that he would please to vouchsafe him the inestimable benefits of it, and endue him with the qualities that promote it, by the powerful operation of that Spirit, whose fruits, love, joy, and peace are peculiarly said to be; who inhabiteth only with those, who do in some measure partake of them, and who to those, with whom he inhabits,

imparteth them yet more and more abundantly.

"Now may the God of peace make "us perfect in every good work to do "his will, working in us that which is "well pleasing in his sight, through Je-"sus Christ our Lord." Amen.

SER-

SERMON X.

THE NATURE AND DUTY OF PUBLIC SPIRIT.

PHILIPPIANS II. 4.

Look not every man on his own things: but every man alſo on the things of others.

THERE are hardly any words more common in the mouths of men, than public ſpirit; a regard to the public; the good of the public; the love of our country; and many others of the like ſort: which are indeed, in their

original design, but different expressions of one and the same thing. The great point is, what these words ought truly to signify; what temper and disposition of mind; what practice and conduct of life, they ought to represent and design. I propose therefore from these words, to consider the true foundation, nature, and extent of public spirit; the bad disposition, and vice, opposite to it; the effects in which this virtue will shew itself; and the motives there are, to the cherishing and improving it in ourselves.

The foundation of it is laid in that virtuous love of ourselves, which is joined with the love of others, united with us in human society: and it must be supported by that great and god-like disposition of mind, which desires and labours to plant happiness, where it is not; and to continue it where it is. And this is the same thing with that comprehensive love and charity towards others, which the gospel came to restore, and to inflame: but this, not so as to exclude that reasonable regard to ourselves, and our own concerns, which never is, nor can be a vice. So far from it, that as long as we are members of human society, nothing

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can more ſecure and improve our own happineſs, than this regard to the happineſs of that ſociety, of which we are members. We can do nothing for that good end, but what will reflect back its happy influences upon ourſelves, in ſome degree or other: as every law for the preſervation and glory, and happineſs of the public, is a law in which all the members of the public muſt find their own account, and their own ſecurity. So that a public ſpirit is not founded upon a regard to others, inconſiſtent with a regard to ourſelves in a good ſenſe; but really takes in that virtuous and praiſeworthy ſelf-love, which conſiders our own true and laſting intereſt, as cloſely united with the happineſs and intereſt of all around us.

This may appear the more clearly, if you conſider the very method, and end, of theſe engagements of mankind with one another, in their entering into the terms of human ſociety. Before you ſuppoſe this engagement, or compact, or whatever you will call it, every man was, properly ſpeaking, one by himſelf; guarding himſelf alone, againſt others; taking

every thing for his ſupport, which could come within his reach; and having himſelf alone, under his own care and protection. The firſt ſtep towards human ſociety muſt ariſe, in the nature of the thing, from a deſire of a more ſettled ſecurity, than every man, by himſelf, could find in his own defence and protection; joined with a benevolent deſire of the ſame good to others, which every one found the want of, in himſelf. And the nature of the ſtipulation, or agreement, muſt have been this; not to profeſs or pretend to throw off all concern for themſelves; or to regard the happineſs of others, in a way inconſiſtent with their own: but to engage for that mutual ſtrength and ſupport, which ſhould be the happineſs of all the members of ſociety; that is, of themſelves as well as of others.

The public ſpirit, therefore, we are now ſpeaking of, as it reſpects human ſociety, muſt be founded upon the original deſign, and end, of human ſociety; which was, in the intent of every man, the good and happineſs of himſelf, conſidered in conjunction with the good and happineſs of others.

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This will lead us to the true account of the oppoſite vice. For it is plain from what hath been ſaid, that this doth not conſiſt in regarding ourſelves; provided we regard ourſelves as members of ſociety, united in the bonds of friendſhip and union with many others, for the ſame end of mutual preſervation and happineſs; but that the crime conſiſts in regarding ourſelves in ſuch a manner, as doth in effect take us again out of that ſociety, into which we were entered; and ſhews that we conſider ourſelves, as retired back again into that ſtate, in which we were originally our own ſupporters, and our own defenders, without regard to any but ourſelves. This every one ſees plainly, in the caſe of notorious offenders, in inſtances which public infamy and conſtant puniſhment have marked with diſgrace; ſuch as open robbery, and violence, and rapine. But it is as true, and as certain, in all other, leſs obſerved, and leſs notorious inſtances. For as men practiſing thoſe vices, have for their own preſent humour, or paſſion, voluntarily removed themſelves out of that ſociety, in which they were once engaged: ſo whoever, out of a

falſe regard to themſelves; either for a preſent gratification of covetouſneſs, pride, ambition, revenge, or the like, hinder the leaſt good, or procure the leaſt evil, to the public, theſe men are in that inſtance, and that degree, upon the ſame footing with the others. They are ſo far got looſe from the bonds of human ſociety. They ſo far regard themſelves as particulars, ſtanding by themſelves. They have ſo far torn themſelves from the ties and concerns of ſocial engagements. And though they may avoid the infamy of common diſgrace, which generally follows nothing but public and ſhameful puniſhment; yet in reality they are but juſt where the others are; that is, they are gone back into a ſtate directly oppoſite to that of human ſociety; and are diveſted of all real title to the advantages of a condition, from which they have voluntarily ſeparated themſelves.

The queſtion therefore, to any man upon this ſubject, is only this, Whether, upon any occaſion, he will regard himſelf, and his own immediate paſſions and views, (which he ſuppoſeth his preſent good) in diſtinction and oppoſition to the

the good of ſociety; or, whether he will be content to regard himſelf, as a member of ſociety; and his own particular good and happineſs, as united and conſiſtent with the good and happineſs of others. In the former caſe, his choice immediately diſſolves the relation between him and others, and gives them a right to look upon, and treat him, as a public enemy. In the latter caſe, his choice is directed by a benevolent temper to himſelf, as well as to others; and by a deſire of the happineſs of others, as united with his own, in the ſame great concerns.

It follows naturally, upon what hath been ſaid, that it is this deſire of the happineſs of others, this generous and diffuſive love of mankind, which, in all ſeaſons, and upon all occaſions, will be our chief defence againſt falling into the vice I have been now ſpeaking of. For though, at the beginning, the firſt thought of entering into the terms of ſociety, was owing to the wants, and defects, which every particular man found in himſelf, for his own particular ſupport and preſervation; yet the end of that ſociety muſt be anſwered, and maintained, by that equitable rule,

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of not expecting from others, what we ourſelves are not ready to afford them, in all like circumſtances. And, in order to afford them, what we think reaſonable to expect from them, we muſt feel, and improve in ourſelves the love and deſire of the happineſs of the world about us; and fix it as a ſteady principle of our own conduct, that it is not only ſtrictly agreeable to the very engagements of human ſociety, in which we are entered; but that it is highly glorious, and honourable, to add to the happineſs, and to diminiſh the miſeries of others, as far as our power and influence can extend themſelves.

The great neceſſity and uſefulneſs of having ſuch a ſupport, laid deep in a well-diſpoſed mind, will appear to any who will give themſelves the trouble of remarking the many powerful, and too often ſucceſsful enemies there are, to this good and benevolent ſpirit. Sometimes covetouſneſs, and ſometimes pride; ſometimes the ambition and thirſt of power, and ſometimes the revenge and rage of diſappointment will overturn the minds of men on a ſudden; and make them forget that they are entered into ſociety with

with their neighbours: unleſs they have firmly fixed it in their own judgments, that it can never be diſhonourable for them to promote the happineſs of others; nor ever be honourable for them in any degree, to take themſelves back again to themſelves, after they have once entered into all the engagements of human ſociety. And this can never be firmly fixed in any mind in which that vicious ſelfiſhneſs reigns, which baniſhes all diſpoſition towards making others happy; and plants in its room a cold neglect of all the reſt of mankind. Many a one who would ſtart at the thought of being an open murderer, or robber, yet is ſometimes found to indulge himſelf out of ſome poor private view or reſentment, in acting a part which puts him as much out of ſociety, and is in its effects, perhaps of more fatal conſequence to the happineſs of mankind, than thouſands of robberies and private acts of violence. The ſame law of equity, condemns the one, which condemns the other. The ſame reaſons engage us againſt the one, which engage us againſt the other. The ſame end of ſociety, and the ſame deſire of the happineſs of others, rightly conſidered, and thoroughly

thoroughly imbibed, would effectually prevent or cure them both. And in caſes, where no public temporal puniſhment follows, nothing but a good principle within, can be of any laſting good conſequence.

As for the effects, that will be ſeen to flow from hence; public ſpirit, or the love of our country, or whatever it may be called, will not ſhew itſelf, as if it were the love of a particular climate, or ſoil; or of a particular conſtitution of government, whatever it be, merely becauſe we happen to be born under it: but it will appear in all the genuine effects of a ſincere deſire of the happineſs of ſociety, and of ourſelves, conſidered as members of ſociety. It will anſwer thoſe ends and engagements of human ſociety, upon which it is built; and produce all the fruits of that love of mankind, which we can never forbear to extol and applaud, wherever we meet with it. It will act with a view to our own happineſs, conſidered as tempered in ſuch a manner with that of others, as that we can never deſtroy our own laſting intereſt, whilſt we promote the common intereſt in which our own lives and breathes.

breathes. It is something as far removed from noise and passion in words; as it is from pride, ambition, covetousness, or revenge, in actions. It doth not always, indeed, sooth and flatter our present passion, or every immediate view of personal profit, or power; but it always tends to secure, even our private good, which we have, by entering into society, mixed with the good of others. In a word, it is seen in a constant regard to the interest of that society, from which our own cannot be separated: and consists, not in a neglect of ourselves; but in a regard to others, closely united, in the same common happiness, or common misery, with ourselves.

I come now to treat of the motives and inducements to this disposition, and practice. And, as I have hitherto considered public spirit with regard to human society; so the first motive naturally ariseth from hence, that the ends and engagements of human society make this the duty of every man, who is not willing to appear false to his honour, and to his assurances. There is no need of any explicit formal contract in this case. For whoever thinks he hath reason to expect the privileges,

privileges, the protection, the ſupport ariſing from ſociety, which I believe few will think they have forfeited, doth by that very thought effectually give, or renew the neceſſary aſſurances on his own part. He acknowledges himſelf bound by all the ties of that ſociety; and conſequently obliged in honour and conſcience to regard himſelf, not as a perſon by himſelf, with his own private paſſions and humours only to gratify, but as one of a number of men whoſe happineſs and intereſt is one and the ſame. Whenever therefore he ſeparates his own good, from that of the whole, into which he profeſſeth voluntarily to throw it every hour that he lives under the benefit and protection of ſocial laws; he ſins againſt thoſe uſeful obligations; with much more diſhonour, and many more fatal conſequences than a man who breaks his private agreement, or revokes his verbal promiſe, or his written bond. It is in vain indeed, that men are entered into the ties of ſociety, unleſs they look upon that very entrance into them, as a ſtrict obligation upon them to act agreeably to thoſe ties.

So that, if you only conſider yourſelves as

as members of human ſociety, you have the ſtrongeſt motive, which honour, and reaſon, and equity, can ſuggeſt; that is, the motive taken from the bonds, and engagements, you have brought yourſelves under; to perform, on your part, what in reaſon you may expect from others in the ſame circumſtances; and what is agreeable and anſwerable to the privileges and protection you think yourſelves entitled to, from the body politic. It is abſolutely unreaſonable and abſurd, for any one who hath any ſenſe of virtue and honour left, to preſume to claim the benefits of laws, and the ſupports ariſing from human ſociety, unleſs he be ready, on his own part, to pay back again all the reciprocal duties reſpecting the good of the whole: which he doth, in effect, promiſe and vow to do, whenever he expects thoſe benefits. The firſt motive therefore is this. You are entered into the engagements of human ſociety. You are obliged in conſcience and honour to anſwer thoſe engagements. And conſequently, are obliged to regard the happineſs of that ſociety, in which your own is concerned; and your own private inclinations, or paſſions,

paſſions, no farther, than as they are conſiſtent, not only with the ſecurity, but with the happineſs, of the public.

If from hence we proceed to conſider ourſelves as reaſonable creatures, brought into being by the great Father of all things; and capable of finding out his exiſtence, nature, and perfections; we ſhall be perſuaded, that we can never be ſo great in ourſelves, as when we conform ourſelves to his will, or imitate his perfections. And, when we know that he loves to communicate happineſs; and that his great glory is, mercy, and goodneſs, diffuſed to all beings, who do not make themſelves incapable of them: this will be a powerful motive to all who know his name, to eſteem it as their own great glory and honour, to reſemble him, in that good and benevolent diſpoſition, to which they themſelves owe all that they enjoy, and all that they can hope for.

If we now conſider ourſelves as chriſtians, we ſhall find that the beſt religion is founded in love; and that this love is not a paſſion, or a fancy, or an enthuſiaſm, of the mind; but the beneficence of practice; that it conſiſts, not in profeſſion,

feſſion, and words, but in deed and action; that it hath no other ſignification, in the law of chriſtians, but doing good, that is, adding to the happineſs, or diminiſhing the miſeries, of others. This is that true friendſhip, with regard to particular perſons, which alone deſerves that name; and this is that true public ſpirit, with regard to the whole ſociety to which we belong, which comprehends and enlivens every duty we owe to it. If we have chriſtian charity, we have that beneficent temper which promotes the good of others; and the more diffuſive and extenſive this is, the more chriſtian it is: and if we feel nothing of the deſire of the happineſs of others, in us, we are certainly void of all that love, which is the foundation, and eſſence, of the goſpel.

The laſt thing I ſhall mention, is ſelf-love and ſelf-intereſt, rightly underſtood. For I am perſuaded that if this be wholly left out of the queſtion; and all regard to themſelves be excluded, ſo that men ſhall find that they are neither to reap profit nor pleaſure, nor honour, nor any advantage from the part they are to act, it is in vain to enter into argument with

with them. Their practice must be determined another way; and the passions of their hearts will easily hurry them, whithersoever they please. And here if men have any native goodness and probity of mind, they will feel within themselves the pleasure and honour of keeping strictly to those engagements, which the nature of human society layeth upon them; and for which alone they receive the supports and protection of it. They will have the reward within of a peaceful breast, undisturbed with the tumults of passion, pride, covetousness, or revenge. They will feel that it is truly speaking much more happy to themselves, to set bounds to their own desires and views, in conjunction with the ends of society, than to break through their obligations, to ruffle and discompose their breasts, merely for the sake of laying hold on every opportunity of adding for the present moment, either to their riches, or their power.

The difference is this, that they will not indeed have the satisfaction of gratifying every present humour, or inclination, or resentment; (if that can be called a satisfaction, which often brings so much private,

private, as well as public, evil along with it): but they will have the satisfaction, even as to themselves, of pursuing their present interest in a more steady and secure, as well as a more honourable way; and at the same time of transmitting down those blessings to their own posterity, which they enjoy themselves. Whereas every breach or violence, made upon the scheme of public good, hath appeared, in multitudes of instances, to have ended even in the temporal disadvantage, or ruin, of the persons themselves who have been tempted to join in it. So it may probably be always, because in its nature it tends to it: but it will certainly affect many hereafter, in whom they ought to think themselves nearly and deeply concerned.

If therefore men have any regard to inward peace and tranquillity; if they have any sense of contentment within, or security without; if they will consult their understanding, and not their passion about their interest; if they are not lost to all sense of the good of their own posterity; if they have not thrown off all regard to their reason, as well as all belief in God; they will think even their present

preſent intereſt, as well as their future reward, ſufficiently conſulted and ſecured by ſuch a temper of mind, as will teach them to diſdain to accept of the benefits of ſociety, without adding to the happineſs of it; and to purſue their own preſent good, always in conjunction with that of the public, to which they belong.

SER-

SERMON XI.

THE WISDOM OF CONSIDERING OUR LATTER END.

DEUTERONOMY XXXII. 29.

O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.

WHEN we know of any remarkable change, that is going to happen in our circumstances, we are apt to dwell upon it in our thoughts; and though something may for a time divert us from considering it, we soon resume the

the meditation, and revolve it over and over in our minds. But one unavoidable change, of a most interesting nature, awaits us all, which we seldom consider, though nothing in the world has a better claim to our habitual attention. That we must shortly die, we are each of us as certain, as that ever we were born; and yet many of us could scarcely think less of dying, were we secure of enjoying an immortality upon earth. The prospect of a removal into another neighbourhood makes us anxious and thoughtful about it; but the assurance of a speedy removal into another world, engages only a rare and slight recollection.

Strange indeed! was it not so common, that a creature capable of forethought and reflection, who has so many symptoms of mortality within him, and such frequent warnings given him by the death of his neighbours, should meet his fate, almost as blind and unattentive to it as the brutes themselves. But we are so taken up with the business, pleasures, and amusements of the world, that we have scarce leisure to think of leaving it; or if we have leisure, we want inclination. Which of us careth to meditate much

much upon his own diſſolution, as abſolutely certain, and in all probability very near? How many ſpend one day and week after another, not once reflecting, that the remainder of life is continually waſting; and that at the longeſt, a ſhort ſucceſſion of days and weeks muſt bring them to the grave! Moſt men are ſo far from taking pains to remember, that they induſtriouſly ſeek to eſcape or baniſh all ſenſe of their mortality. If by ſome accident it forceth itſelf upon them, they flatter themſelves that it is a remote event, and diſmiſs the conſideration of it as unſeaſonable and premature. They hate and drive away the gloomy imagination which checks their licentiouſneſs, damps their gaiety, and conſtrains them to be ſerious. They are ſo cowardly withal, that they dare not apply themſelves in good earneſt to meditate upon death. Their timorous minds recoil at the frightful idea, and find no repoſe till they are delivered from this diſagreeable companion. They fly therefore into the hurry of buſineſs, the noiſe of company, or the gay circle of pleaſure; glad if by any means they can divert their thoughts, and forget their mortality. Thus there is room

for applying to the generality of mankind that affectionate wiſh which the great lawgiver expreſſed concerning the Jews; "O that they were wiſe, that "they underſtood this, that they would "conſider their latter end."

I ſhall endeavour, in what follows, to ſhew the wiſdom and importance of attending to our mortality. And among all the precepts that were ever delivered in order to mend the heart, there is none of greater and more univerſal uſe, than this, that we be daily mindful of death. This ſingle conſideration, often renewed, and deeply impreſſed upon the mind, would moderate our paſſions, and make us diligent in acquiring the habits, and doing the works of piety and goodneſs. In proſperity it would preſerve us from inſolence, and in adverſity from dejection of mind. We ſhould not be ſo apt to inſult and deſpiſe our inferiors, did we often reflect upon the common duſt, wherein all diſtinction will ſoon be loſt between us and the meaneſt of mortals.

One ſerious look towards the grave would be ſufficient to abaſh our pride, to make us humble in the higheſt ſtations, and to extinguiſh all remains of

contempt

contempt towards any of our fellow-creatures, how far ſoever they are placed below us. The thoughts of dying would enable us to enjoy good fortune with moderation. They would keep down all indecent and vain exultations, were we raiſed ever ſo high, and ever ſo ſuddenly. The grand houſe, the ample fortune, the walks and gardens, woods and plains, the outward pomp and ornaments of life, muſt all be left in a ſhort time, and loſt for ever. Who then would be tranſported beyond meaſure with the poſſeſſion of theſe things? who would be too much elevated on account of any worldly enjoyments, if he conſidered, as he ought, that they muſt all in a few years terminate in death?

Meditations upon death would help to preſerve our temper even and compoſed in every condition. Hence we might learn both to "rejoice as though we rejoiced not" in the day of proſperity, and to "weep as though we wept not" upon ſorrowful occaſions. The good man, while toſt upon the ſea of life, is never out of ſight of land, and may comfort himſelf, whenever he pleaſes, by looking to the end of his toils and

ſorrows. Is he afflicted with bodily pain? he ſhall ſoon be delivered from the body, and along with it, from all its diſorders. Is he mourning the loſs of his friends? he ſhall be reſtored to the enjoyment of them in a happier world, never more to be ſeparated from them. Death is a ſecure haven, in his courſe towards which, no accidents can retard him; where, as ſoon as he arrives, (and ſhortly he muſt) he ſhall not only be releaſed from his troubles, but placed beyond all poſſibility and fear of affliction. Hither then let him frequently direct his views, that the proſpect of their approaching period, may encourage and ſupport him under his preſent calamities.

Thus by conſidering our latter end, we might keep even the balance of our minds, neither elevated with the gifts, nor ſinking beneath the preſſures of fortune. At the lively idea of death, all the paſſions ſubſide, and leave the ſoul in a ſtate of ſerious tranquillity. Envy dies away, reſentment cools, and the fond admiration of worldly things decays and vaniſhes. We ſhall ſcarcely be diſturbed, becauſe others exceed us in wealth and grandeur, if we frequently recollect, that in a very little

little time, death will entirely aboliſh theſe diſtinctions, and reduce all men to the ſame equality in which they were born. The remembrance of death would alſo aſſiſt us in ſubduing our anger: both as it abates our pride, which gives the edge to injuries and affronts; and as it leſſens in our eyes, the value of thoſe things in which we are injured. When you are moved with indignation, ſays one upon any account, it will be of ſervice, if you call to mind, that human life is momentary, and that it will not be long before we ſhall each of us be carried to the grave. Such meditations will contribute to ſtifle every ill-natured paſſion, and to work us into a mild placable humane temper.

Death, did we liſten to its inſtructions, would ſhew us in the cleareſt light the vanity of human things; and teach us to look down upon them with a noble indifference. It demonſtrates beyond all diſpute, that whatever they may be in their own nature, they are momentary and periſhing with regard to us; and that therefore it is madneſs to purſue them with vehemence and anxiety. The tomb with ſilent, but irreſiſtible eloquence, re-

proves the folly of avarice and ambition.

But however oppoſite the ſenſe of death may be to the covetous and the aſpiring humour, it may perhaps be thought likely rather to promote, than diſcourage an inclination to indolence and pleaſure. Our mortality, we know hath often been made an argument for a ſoft and luxurious life, and this maxim hath been embraced by many as juſt and rational; "let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die." The meaning of this exhortation muſt doubtleſs be; that we ſhould enjoy the preſent in the beſt manner we can, becauſe we are certain of nothing beyond it. Now though the advice expreſſed in theſe general terms, may be thought wiſe and good; yet the reaſon by which it is ſupported, is ſomewhat extraordinary. For what if we muſt not die to morrow? What if we are aſſured, we muſt never die? Would it not ſtill be the wiſe part, to make the beſt of every fleeting moment? But to paſs by this abſurdity, the abovementioned maxim, as applied by the men of pleaſure, to recommend a voluptuous life, goes upon two ſuppoſitions, which are equally falſe. Firſt it ſuppoſes, that to eat and drink, is to make

make the beſt of the preſent time, conſidered by itſelf; and ſecondly, that death is the end of our exiſtence. Whereas ſenſual gratifications are in fact the meaneſt and the moſt worthleſs, of which our nature is capable; and beyond all compariſon inferior to the pleaſures that flow from virtue and religion. And therefore, whether we muſt die to morrow, or not die at all, it is folly to waſte in gratifying our ſenſes, thoſe moments which we may employ to much better advantage in improving our minds, and performing the offices of piety and virtue. Thus even they, who regard death as the final period of their being, can draw from thence no juſt argument in favour of licentiouſneſs.

But death is not the end; it is only a change in the manner of our exiſtence; a ſeparation of ſoul and body; the former of which will continue, when the latter is mouldered into duſt. And conſidered in this light, ſo far is death from recommending the purſuit of bodily pleaſure, that it pleads againſt it no leſs earneſtly, than againſt the purſuits of honour and wealth. Your ſoul muſt ſhortly be divided from this body, and exiſt, for a

time at least, apart by herself. Now if you cherish in her an affection towards it, and those pleasures which depend upon it, she will be torn from it at last with difficulty and reluctance; and remain miserable in her state of separation: regretting the loss of what she had principally valued, and wishing in vain to be again restored to the enjoyment of it. You should therefore be daily weaning her from a fondness for the body, and be loosening the bonds, which hold them together; that being thus prepared, she may pass through the approaching dissolution willingly and with ease: and not be tormented afterwards with vain desires of re-union, which it will not be in her power to accomplish.

The strongest cement, which binds the spiritual to the earthly part, is the lust of sensual gratifications; and this lust may be strengthened by habits of indulgence to such a degree, that the mind shall be altogether impatient and restless, if deprived for any long season of its wonted enjoyments. And since we can scarce doubt, but that after its departure, the spirit still retains the same habits and affections, it had before; how wretched must

muſt be the condition of that ſoul, which, upon leaving the body, finds ſhe is, and for ever ſhall be incapable of thoſe ſenſations, in which alone ſhe places all her happineſs? Therefore the conſideration of death, rightly underſtood, is ſo far from countenancing a voluptuous life; that it will excite every wiſe man to die daily: that is, to diſengage himſelf, as as much as may be, from the body and its pleaſures; that when he cannot enjoy, he may not want them.

An habitual attention to our latter end would contribute, not only to wean our affections from the things of time and ſenſe, but alſo to fix them upon objects which are ſpiritual and eternal. As ſoon as the connexion between the mind and body is diſſolved, it is plain the ſoul can be ſuſceptible of no enjoyments, but what are of a purely ſpiritual nature. Its happineſs in that diſembodied ſtate, ſo far as we can deſcribe it, will ariſe from the love of God; from the conſciouſneſs of a growing reſemblance to him; from the admiration of his works and perfections; from enlarging and ſatisfying views of truth; and from the exerciſe of benevolence and mutual friendſhip with

good beings. If then we are not willing our happiness should terminate with the present life, it concerns us to cultivate a relish for these noble entertainments; for though we should be translated into heaven when we die, if we die without any taste for its refined satisfactions, we cannot be happy in heaven itself.

I may seem to wander beyond my subject, but in reality it is scarcely possible to meditate upon death without entering into its momentous consequences. While we view, in the most careless manner, the short passage between this and the other world, we cannot forbear to glance upon the scene which lies beyond it; a scene, that presents to us the greatest and most interesting realities, which the human mind is capable of considering; and this above all shews the importance of an attention to our latter end. It is not only edifying in itself, but by a natural, and almost necessary train of thought, leads us into reflections upon other subjects, in the highest degree useful and important. It guides the imagination forward into eternity; makes an hereafter, as it were, present to the mind; awakens the apprehension of a future judgment; and gives the

the rewards and punishments of the world to come, their full weight and impression upon us. Thus it will suggest to us, the most powerful motives to a godly life; and excite us by a patient continuance in well-doing, to seek for glory, honour, and immortality.

Did we place death habitually before our eyes, it would engage us to apply ourselves with all our might to the proper business of life, and to pursue it without intermission. It would represent the extreme folly and danger of delays; warning us, that the present season alone is ours; that if we count upon to morrow, we depend upon an absolute uncertainty; and that while we stand trifling, and only framing distant purposes, opportunity may slip out of our hands and be lost, beyond the possibility of being retrieved. Hence we should be admonished to use our time, as it comes, to the best purpose, in improving our minds, and serving our generation; not wasting the day-light of life in sloth and impertinencies; but working while it is called to-day, because the night is at hand, in which no man can work.

What has been said may suffice to shew

the wiſdom and importance of "conſidering our latter end."

You may object, that the idea of death is diſagreeable and ſhocking; that it will damp our ſpirits, and render us indiſpoſed for the gay amuſements and pleaſures of the world. Now if you mean by this, that it will check our levity, and give our thoughts a more ſerious turn, I acknowledge it will; but then I aſk, ſuppoſing it does, where will be the harm? I am ſo far from eſteeming this a bad circumſtance, that I count it among the advantages which flow from a ſenſe of our mortality. But will it not diſturb our peace, and fill us with fearful apprehenſions? If ſo, where is the prudence of dwelling ſo much upon it? Would it not be wiſer to follow the common practice, and keep it out of our thoughts as much as we can? Is it not better blindly to meet our fate, like the brutes, than fixing our eyes conſtantly upon death, to live in continual ſolicitude? To this it might be a ſufficient reply; that ſince meditations upon death, are ſo profitable to us, though they may be attended with ſome uneaſineſs, it would be worth our while to bear the pain, for the ſake of the

the benefits ariſing from them. But this matter deſerves to be conſidered a little more fully.

We might make the idea of death eaſy and familiar, by daily reflecting upon our latter end. The awe, which it naturally ſtrikes upon the mind, will wear off in proportion, as we encreaſe our intimacy with it. But inſtead of cultivating this acquaintance, we induſtriouſly avoid it; and the ſurpriſe will add to the horror of its appearance, whenever it conſtrains, as ſometimes it will conſtrain our attention. There are, we know, certain occaſions, on which it is impoſſible for us to ſhun the remembrance of death. There are certain ſeaſons of life, when it will have our attention, our principal attention, whether we will or no. Now there is but one way to eſcape an alarm upon ſuch occaſions, and that is, daily to meditate upon death, and prepare ourſelves for it through the whole of life. The more we conſider it, the leſs will it diſturb us; whereas if the thought is unuſual and ſtrange, the uncommonneſs of it, will render it the more ſhocking, when it is forced upon us by accident.

If you are not prepared for death, you have

have most need of all to be mindful of it; that hence you may be warned to get yourself ready. If you are prepared, you have no reason to be distressed at the prospect of dying. For to a good man, what is there so formidable in death? Is it the act of dying? For aught we know, it may be attended with no extraordinary pain; or if it be painful, it is over in an instant. Shall he then tremble at the consequences of death? These to him are far from being dreadful; they are more than comfortable; they are joyful and glorious! Can it be so dismal to reflect, that he is hastening towards the final period of his affliction; which if they were to have no period, would be dismal indeed? Is there any thing so uncomfortable in the fore-sight of a speedy removal out of a world, which abounds with pain and guilt, and folly, into a state of eternal rest, and unspeakable felicity? Shall not the lively expectation of such an event, support him under the evils of life, and enable him to maintain an uniform serenity? It will not only not injure his tranquillity, but secure it from being injured by other accidents. It will not ruffle, but calm his temper. Instead of disturbing,

ing, it will eſtabliſh his peace. Inſtead of impairing, it will greatly promote his good humour and chearfulneſs. It will ſupply him with a fund of conſtant joy, and keep him in the beſt diſpoſition for reliſhing the harmleſs pleaſures and amuſements of life. We ſhould therefore often conſider our latter end, becauſe this exerciſe, at the ſame time that it improves the mind, may alſo contribute to its chearfulneſs and comfort.

Upon the whole, ſuch is our forgetfulneſs of death, and ſuch the wiſdom of attending to it, that if there was a voice, which might be heard through the whole earth, it would be well employed in daily admoniſhing the ſons of men; "Remember you are mortal." Or if we had each of us a guardian angel, whoſe office it ſhould be, frequently to whiſper in our ears this important truth, it might be of infinite ſervice to us. God has given us underſtanding for our guardian angel, which attending to the voice of univerſal nature, and learning from thence, that it is appointed for us and for all men once to die, may ſupply the want of other monitors. Let us willingly receive its ſuggeſtions. Let us conſider our own death,

as

as a certain event; as in all probability very near; as impoſſible to lie at any great diſtance. Through all our purſuits, buſineſs, and amuſements, let us carry along with us the ſenſe of our mortality. Let us often revive it out of choice; and when it comes by accident, let us not ſeek to drive it away, as an impertinent intruder, but entertain and cheriſh it as a welcome gueſt.

We ſhould regard all the pains and diſorders of our body, as ſo many tendencies towards a diſſolution; as ſo many ſymptoms of its near approach. When we ſee others falling on every ſide of us, it ſhould always make one of our inmoſt thoughts, that for aught we know, our turn may be next. When we follow the corps of a friend or a neighbour to its long home, we ſhould not ſuffer the ſentiments to eſcape us, that we ourſelves muſt ſhortly be carried the ſame way. We ſhould frequently conſider what numbers of thoſe who came along with us or followed us into life, are gone out of it already; many of which were more likely to have been our ſurvivors, than we theirs. We live in a world where every thing is dying around us; plants and

and trees, animals and men. We can ſcarce open our eyes, but we meet with ſome object or another, which points to the tomb, and which if we are not extremely ſtupid, will afford us a hint of our own mortality. The flowers of the field, the ſhadows which glide over the plains, the vapour which appears, and then immediately vaniſhes, preſent us with lively emblems of the ſhortneſs of human life. All the productions both of art and nature, the impregnable edifice, the everlaſting hills, as they are called, and the great globe itſelf, are tending to decay and diſſolution. As for the generations of men, who are very properly diſtinguiſhed by the name of mortals, they are an eaſy prey to devouring time, and follow one another in quick ſucceſſion.

In this world of death, as it would be great ſtupidity to forget our latter end, ſo it were madneſs to remember it, and at the ſame time neglect to prepare for it. The beſt preparation for death is a virtuous temper, and a good life. When once you are furniſhed with theſe qualifications, you may view it approaching towards you with a calm and conſtant mind, free

free from any timorous, unmanly solicitude.

SER-

SERMON XII.

THE PRESENT REWARDS OF BENEFICENCE.

JOB XXIX. 11, 12, 13.

When the ear heard me, then it bleſſed me; and when the eye ſaw me, it gave witneſs to me. Becauſe I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherleſs, and him that had none to help him. The bleſſing of him that was ready to periſh came upon me, and I cauſed the widow's heart to ſing for joy.

IT is a natural kind of indulgence to any preſent ſorrow, which affects and diſquiets us, to call back to our view the many

many blessings we have formerly enjoyed, and of which, as is probable, this change of situation has taught us the true value.

Thus we find Job, in the beginning of this chapter, crying out, "Oh that I "were as in months past, as in the "days when God preserved me! When "his candle shined upon my head, and "when by his light I walked through "darkness: when the Almighty was yet "with me, when my children were about "me: when I washed my steps with "butter, and the rock poured me out "rivers of oil: when I went out to the "gate through the city, when I prepared "my seat in the street; the young men "saw me, and hid themselves, and the "aged arose, and stood up: the princes "refrained talking, and laid their hand "on their mouth: the nobles held their "peace, and their tongue cleaved to the "roof of their mouth."

But beside that it is common with the afflicted thus to sooth, and indulge their present sorrows; it is reasonable to conclude, that Job had a particular point in view in this chapter: in the twenty-second we meet with Eliphaz thus accusing him;

him; "is not thy wickedneſs great, and "thine iniquities infinite? For thou haſt "taken a pledge from thy brother for "nought, and ſtripped the naked of "their cloathing: Thou haſt not given "water to the weary to drink, and thou "haſt with-holden bread from the hun-"gry: Thou haſt ſent widows away "empty, and the arms of the fatherleſs "have been broken."

Againſt ſo heavy, and withal ſo groundleſs an imputation, Job makes his defence in my text, and the following paſſages. So far was he from being the unmerciful, oppreſſive perſon, which Eliphaz had been deſcribing, that it had been his conſtant employment to relieve miſery, and to redreſs wrongs. In his judicial capacity he had always paid the ſtricteſt regard to juſtice and truth: he was "a father to the poor," and felt ſuch a compaſſion and tenderneſs for them, that the cauſe which "he knew not, he ſearched out:" and as a conſequence of this humanity and uncorruptneſs, "they "waited for him, as for the rain, and "they opened their mouth wide, as for "the latter rain:" the ear would never have bleſſed the voice of the oppreſ-

for;"

for; nor would the eye have given witneſs to injuſtice and cruelty: the poor never would have waited with impatience for an oppreſſor, nor could his preſence and influence be compared to the refreſhment of the latter rain. So eaſy was it to confute this calumny of Eliphaz, from its utter inconſiſtency with the ſeveral facts here related, for the truth of which he appeals to a cloud of witneſſes.

The occaſion of theſe words being thus opened to you, you will eaſily perceive that they very naturally ſuggeſt to us the following obſervations.

That a benevolent and merciful diſpoſition, which ſhews itſelf in acts of kindneſs and relief, gives us the ſureſt claim to the love and eſteem of mankind.

That all acts and offices of this nature are attended with preſent pleaſure and ſatisfaction. And,

That, beſide this preſent pleaſure and ſatisfaction, they "lay up in ſtore for us "a good foundation" of both "againſt "the time to come."

The firſt obſervation is, That a benevolent and merciful diſpoſition, which ſhews itſelf in acts of kindneſs and relief, gives

gives us the ſureſt claim to the love and eſteem of mankind.

We ſhall ſoon diſcover the foundation and juſtneſs of this obſervation, by conſidering, that thoſe virtuous diſpoſitions, and actions in which mankind have the greateſt intereſt, and from which they receive moſt benefit, will naturally engage the largeſt ſhare of their love and eſteem.

The man, who complies with the ſtricteſt rules of temperance, who is arrived at that happy ſtate of mind, that with regard to all his gratifications, reaſon and religion are duly heard, is no doubt, an object that deſerves the greateſt regard and attention; and ſuch as a reaſonable mind cannot ſurvey without the higheſt approbation: and yet it muſt be allowed, that mankind is affected in a very different manner, and the impreſſions are much weaker, upon this occaſion, than they are, when we contemplate that character which goes about doing good, and which is induſtrious in finding out and relieving the miſerable.

In the former inſtance, it is an agreeable, as well as uſeful employment, for the mind to conſider the real happineſs of acting under the influence of reaſon and religion;

religion; to obſerve what a conſiſtency of conduct, and ſteadineſs in virtue they inſpire: theſe conſiderations will tend to raiſe our admiration, and ſhould effectually excite a deſire to be like him: but in the latter inſtance there is ſomething, which not only engages our notice, but our hearts; it not only furniſhes out an agreeable and entertaining ſpeculation, but we taſte, as well as ſee, the goodneſs which we admire. The mind and judgment are not only employed and engaged in ſurveying and approving ſuch a character; but its uſefulneſs and beauty excites, and even warms the affections.

Agreeably to what I have been obſerving, it is rematkably, that the greateſt and moſt diſtinguiſhing talents cannot command this love and eſteem, but in proportion as they are more or leſs uſeful to mankind: they will be apt to attract the eyes of men, and the perſons who are poſſeſſed of them, will probably be gazed at. The effect which they have upon the world, is like that of a comet, or any other extraordinary appearance which ſerves to raiſe our admiration or aſtoniſhment: whereas the character in my

text

text excites and warms our affections, and as I have remarked, irresistibly makes its way into our hearts.

It should be considered likewise by those who enjoy them, that there is something invidious in the possession of great abilities of mind or fortune; and that there is no circumstance which so effectually prevents the envy they are apt to raise, as a just and proper use of them: no one will repine at that abundance, which is perpetually adding to the scanty portion of others; he will rather consider it, as a refuge for himself in time of need. No man can be envious or grieved at his skill or power to persuade, who is ready to exert them in pleading the cause of the injured and oppressed: no one surely can think it matter of just discontent, that another is blessed with greater sagacity and strength of mind, when he can always have recourse to them under any difficulties. In a word, no one will complain that nature or Providence has been too bountiful to him, who makes this right use of the gifts of both. By this means, you see we may prevent the guilt of others, as well as our own; nay we may not only prevent the guilt of envy,

but diſpoſe them even to be thankful for what we enjoy. But what was the practice of our great example? To bind up "the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty "to the captives, to give unto them that "mourn, beauty for aſhes, the oil of joy "for mourning, the garment of praiſe "for the ſpirit of heavineſs;" to liſten to the cries and importunity of every afflicted object, and to make this moſt gracious and engaging reply, "what wilt thou, that I ſhall do for thee?" It was by this means that he, who was "the deſire of all nations," before he appeared among us, was the delight of mankind, when he appeared: his doctrine and his miracles convinced their underſtandings; but it was his mercy and goodneſs, and becauſe they ſaw he was mighty to ſave, which gave him poſſeſſion of their hearts. To this cauſe it may probably be aſcribed, that the Jews did not ſooner attempt to "lay hold on him, becauſe they feared the people," whoſe inclinations he had captivated and won by a life of pity and condeſcenſion, and who could not therefore but conſider themſelves very nearly intereſted in what befel

befel ſuch a friend and lover of mankind.

But beſides that love and eſteem which we are ſure to gain by a benevolent and merciful diſpoſition, we are further invited to ſuch actions, as proceed from it, by the preſent pleaſure and ſatisfaction which attends them.

"When the good Samaritan went to "the wounded ſtranger and bound up his "wounds, pouring in oil and wine;" who can ſay, that the wounded perſon did not impart more comfort than he received? That relief which with regard to the latter, was only a mitigation of pain, gave the former the moſt exquiſite pleaſure: every ſtep which he took in the progreſs of this moſt engaging inſtance of humanity, improved and heightened his own gratification. If he had not run through this ſeries and ſucceſſion of good offices, his pleaſure would not have been ſo entire, and the complacency and ſatisfaction reſulting from well-doing would have been leſs ſenſible and quick: but when his compaſſion had thus finiſhed its work, his joy was full.

Or ſuppoſe ye, that the father in the parable, went without his ſhare of delight, and even tranſport in receiving a ſon who

had ſtrayed from his boſom? How think ye? Did not his heart burn within him, when he ſaw that change, which he had ſo impatiently waited for; and his ſon as it is there well expreſſed, coming to himſelf? When he ſaw him thus diſguſted at his former purſuits, and preferring, upon the fulleſt conviction, the path of religion and virtue, it is not eaſy to conceive, much leſs expreſs, the tranſport of the father.

The ſame way of reaſoning will appear to be equally true and juſt, if we go through the ſeveral inſtances of doing good contained in my text. Can there be a greater or more ſincere pleaſure, than to deliver the poor that cries from that diſtreſs or oppreſſion, which is too ſtrong for him; to "break his bonds a-"ſunder, to caſt away his cords from "him," and afford him a place of refuge, where he may "no more hear the voice of the oppreſſor."

Or what employment can yield more true delight, more unmixed ſatisfaction, than to endeavour to imitate the great pattern of all perfection, in that moſt amiable character, of being a "father of the fatherleſs?"

What

What ſound can be more grateful to our ears, or make ſweeter "melody in our hearts," than "the bleſſing of him who was ready to periſh," but brought back by our care and tenderneſs to life and comfort?

Or laſtly; Whither ſhall we go, and find an entertainment for a reaſonable being, who knows and conſiders his own ſituation, and the innumerable accidents and evils to which it is expoſed, equal to that of "making the widow's heart," diſtracted with cares, and "pierced through "with many ſorrows, to ſing for joy; of "having pity on her fatherleſs children," of entering into her concern and anxiety for their ſafety and ſucceſs, and of beholding them at laſt, through our aſſiſtance and advice, the ſolace of her misfortunes, and the ſupport of her age? Theſe are the true joys, if any ſuch are to be found on earth!

There is ſomething in compaſſion ſo interwoven with, and agreeable to our nature, that we offer a violence to ourſelves, when we reſiſt its calls, and deny its requeſts: it is ſo natural to man, that it takes its name from him, and is called humanity: it is ſo eſſential a part of him

that the want of it degrades him from the order of beings to which he belongs. The bare contemplation and recital of acts of true compaſſion affects the heart in the moſt agreeable and intereſting manner; how great, how exquiſite then muſt the pleaſure be of going, and doing likewiſe!

But beſides that preſent pleaſure and ſatisfaction, which attends a benevolent and merciful diſpoſition, there is this farther motive ſtrongly to recommend it, that "it lays up in ſtore for us a good foundation" of both "againſt the time to come."

It is a diſtinguiſhing part of our character, as men, that we can recall, and review our paſt actions: the moſt thoughtleſs and inconſiderate will ſometimes find himſelf thus employed, though it ſeems to be the great buſineſs of his life to guard againſt ſuch employment.

If this reflection is a juſt one, it will follow from it, that thoſe actions ſhould be preferred and delighted in by a reaſonable mind, which can beſt bear a review; and that we ſhould with the greateſt care abſtain from thoſe, the remembrance of which will be bitter to us. It ſhould always

always be considered by us, when we are moved or sollicited to any action, not only in what light it appears to us at present, but how it will appear hereafter, when the mind will survey it with greater freedom and impartiality; when the present motive or temptation, which had so much influence in determining us, will disappear, and consequently when we shall view the action abstractedly, and in itself.

In general, this may be laid down as a certain truth, that there can be no true pleasure to a reasonable mind in reflecting upon any advantages which we have enjoyed, but in proportion as we have made the right use of them. This consideration must fix the degrees of our complacency and satisfaction in such reflections; and where this is wanting, they will always end in accusation and remorse: where this is not the case, so far shall we be from feeling any satisfaction in looking back upon those advantages which we have enjoyed, that there will be a peculiar bitterness in the remembrance, that we have received our good things. Accordingly we find Job drawing all his consolation from the right use of those

bleſſing which he had enjoyed; not pleaſing himſelf with the bare thought, that he had poſſeſſed ſuch and ſuch honours, but that while they were in his poſſeſſion they had been inſtrumental to the ſafety, and happineſs of mankind: and the ſame reflection muſt be every man's ſupport in the day of trial.

Among thoſe actions which can beſt bear reflection, and yield us, upon a review the trueſt pleaſure, works of real mercy and compaſſion ſeeem to claim the firſt place. The "merciful man does good to his own ſoul," by laying in ſuch a fund of agreeable reflections, as may come in to his relief, under any of the diſappointments and evils of this life. Theſe reflections will bear him company in ſolitude, they will adminiſter eaſe in ſickneſs, and comfort in affliction; they will ſpeak peace and hope to a troubled and dejected mind, and will help him to diſarm even the king of terrors.

And when we conſider what frequent calls there are for our compaſſion, we cannot but ſee how wiſely it is contrived, that there ſhould be ſo many motives to excite and raiſe it; and how indulgent the Author of our nature is in annexing

ſuch

ſuch a peculiar pleaſure and ſatisfaction to the practice of this virtue. At every turn we meet the ſons and daughters of affliction, and which way ſoever we take, we are encountered by diſtreſs.

Let us then, indulge every generous and compaſſionate feeling of our natures; and, on every proper occaſion, let us take pleaſure in performing acts of beneficence. That man can never be weary in well-doing, who remembers and duly weighs the words of the Lord Jeſus, who could not raiſe in us vain hopes, who could not beguile us into the purſuit of falſe happineſs, when he ſaid, "it is more bleſſed to give, than to receive."

SERMON XIII.

CONTINUAL PROGRESS IN VIRTUE RECOMMENDED.

PROVERBS IV. 18.

The path of the juſt is as the ſhining light, that ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day.

THERE are many, and ſome too who call themſelves philoſophers, (who by the way never underſtood the true end of living,) that have repreſented human life, as a dull buſineſs not worth a

man's care; where the ſame things come over and over again; "like a tale that is told:" which however entertaining it may appear while it is new; yet by frequent repetitions, at laſt becomes perfectly tedious and inſipid. The conſequence of which has been, that many viewing the picture in this diſagreeable light, have been inclined to throw off all concern about it; any farther than to arrive at a ſecure indolence of body, and a peaceful tranquillity, or rather inſenſibility of mind; to ſhut out all reflexion any farther than juſt to remedy or remove ſuch inconveniences, as the common accidents of life may occaſionally produce: and others, loathing the ſame viands ſo often ſerved up, or fretted and ſoured by the many croſſes and calamities intailed upon this imperfect ſtate, have as ridiculouſly as raſhly, put an end to their being.

And true it is, that the lives of too many have been but one barren circle, to which they have been as it were inchanted. But though many may have made life a dull round of inſignificant actions, yet no man had ever occaſion to make it ſo. It is ſo indeed to brutes, which ſoon arrive at

at that pitch of perfection which is allotted to their nature: where they must stop short, without a possibility of going any farther. Sense which is the highest natural power they have, moves in a narrow sphere; its objects are in comparison few; and moreover dull and gross: and therefore not only come more quickly round, but become more languid and dull in every revolution. But man is endued with nobler faculties, and presented with nobler objects whereon to exercise and employ them. The contemplation of all moral and divine truths to engage his understanding: the love of the Creator, and all the beauties of the natural and moral world to attract and captivate his affections: the power, wisdom, and goodness of God manifested in the whole extent of the creation, to exalt his admiration, and call forth all his praise. The opportunities of all good actions to produce the pleasures of virtue and a good conscience. Nothing can bound the noble range of reason, ever improving, and ever improveable; nothing can abate the ardor of the affections, which are placed upon the fountain and foundation of all love, of all beauty and harmony: nothing

thing can diminiſh the admiration of a univerſe, where the very minuteſt parts are above the higheſt human comprehenſion: nothing can deaden the pleaſures of virtue and a good conſcience, which, the more they are taſted, the more they are deſirable. Here is a noble path for a rational creature to travel in: his continued advancement in it, his daily improvement in knowledge, virtue and goodneſs, will conſtitute his higheſt perfection here, and terminate in a perfect conſummation of endleſs bliſs and glory: "The path of the juſt is as the ſhining "light, that ſhineth more and more unto "the perfect day."

If we trace the progreſs of the human mind from the firſt dawnings of ſenſe and reaſon, we may ſee from what ſmall beginnings it acquires a prodigious ſtore of intellectual knowledge. The view fills us with admiration, and we are naturally led to wiſh, nay, to make it the ſum of our wiſhes, that we could be able to traverſe thoſe regions of ſcience, whereof ſome noble geniuſes have made themſelves maſters: but though we admire, we need not complain. It has indeed pleaſed the all-wiſe Governor of the world

world to make a great distinction in the original frame of human souls, with respect to the intellectual powers: a provision absolutely necessary for answering the purposes of civil government, where a subordination is necessarily implied; for so much wisdom will always produce so much power. But whether we may always observe it or no, our Saviour's command to his disciples is virtually fulfilled in every community: "He that is "the greatest among you, let him be "your servant." If the men who are blessed with distinguished abilities, make a proper use of them, (and otherwise they need not be envied) they are really increasing the measure of the public good; and, in that, doing service to the meanest individual: and therefore reputation and esteem are but a due acknowledgment for their good offices. But to expect or desire honour from men is but a low ambition. Let us try to recommend ourselves to the approbation of Him, whose "judgment is not as man's judgment." The very best part of knowledge is knowing how to discharge rightly our duty to God; and therefore the performance of that duty must still be of higher estimation,

tion. And in this mankind are more upon an equal footing. The moral powers, like the natural perfections of the body, are more equally diſtributed; and in them there is as large a field laid open for our advancement towards perfection, as there is in the intellectual.

It is true, we may have unhappily ſtruck into a wrong path, and be wandering in the ways of wickedneſs: but, by a ſerious recollection, and application to Divine Mercy, we may yet find a "lamp to our feet, and a light unto our paths." Our evil habits, thoſe cords that hold us in captivity to ſin, though we may not be able at once to caſt them away from us, yet we may inſenſibly weaken, and at laſt break aſunder, by gradually unravelling the ſmaller lines of their contexture. Our inclinations, that may have taken a wrong bent, we may counteract, and by degrees recover to their original rectitude. Where our nature favours a particular virtue, there we may ſecond it, and graft upon it; under the branches whereof other hopeful ſeeds may take root, ſpring up, and proſper. After this we may ſtill be looking

looking into the culture of the ſoul, and ſtudying daily improvements, by calling forth virtues, or ſeveral degrees of virtue, that have not yet made their appearance, and by cheriſhing and bringing to perfection thoſe that have. Thus will our minds reſemble thoſe fruit-trees, in which, while ſeveral of the productions are come to maturity, others are bloſſoming, and giving promiſes of reaching the ſame degrees of excellence.

No man knows what he can do, till he is firmly reſolved to do whatever he can. When men have thought themſelves obliged to ſet about any buſineſs in good earneſt, they have done that which their indolence made them ſuppoſe impoſſible. There are ſeveral abilities unknown to the poſſeſſors, which lie hid in the mind for want of an occaſion to call them forth.

We have the ſame natural powers, and the ſame gracious aids for preſerving and improving our virtues, as we had originally for attaining them. What then ſhould reſtrain or hinder our continual progreſs? Does the difficulty lie in the thing itſelf? Is it a harder taſk to continue and grow more perfect in a habit

habit of virtue, than it is at firſt to acquire ſuch habit? On the contrary, it has always been preſumed, and always allowed, that whatever difficulties and diſcouragements may attend our firſt entrance on the paths of virtue, yet on purſuing our journey we find the proſpect more chearful and inviting every ſtep we take: whatever mixtures of vice may debaſe the firſt compoſitions of virtue, yet each repetition of good actions, like the repeated eſſays of the refiner, ſeparates the droſs, and leaves the ſubſtance more pure. However the ſoul, at its firſt riſing from the ground, may flutter and mount heavily; yet, when once it is thoroughly upon the wing, it flies along with an eaſy, vigorous, and continued motion; and, in alluſion to the words of the text, though the firſt dawn of religion upon the ſouls of men may be but as the wings of the morning, ſpreading themſelves upon the mountains, yet it gradually attains to a meridian altitude.

So far then ought we to be from conſidering this life as a dull, confined round of the ſame inſignificant trifles, that we ought to look upon it as an indefinite line; wherein every ſtep we take is, or ought

ought to be, an important and valuable advance in goodneſs: an addition to that number of good actions, whoſe ſum will render our happineſs the more exalted and complete. It will carry us on till we become here on earth little lower than the angels; and by a natural and eaſy tranſition, ſhall be made equal to them in heaven: which leads me

To offer ſome reaſons and conſiderations to engage us in ſuch a practice.

And firſt, let it be conſidered, that this progreſſive ſtate is our duty. In this view we may obſerve, that the ſcriptures have not determined what preciſe quantity of goodneſs, neither more nor leſs, will intitle us to the favour of God; and by that, to the inheritance that fadeth not away: it being their deſign to make men not juſt ſo far virtuous, and no farther; but to make them as virtuous and pious as poſſible. Accordingly we are commanded to "grow in grace, to go on to per-"fection, to be perfect, even as our Fa-"ther which is in heaven is perfect; to "be holy as he is holy; merciful, as he "is merciful." The degrees indeed of theſe perfections we ſhall never be able

fully

fully to reach, nor is it the intention of the command that we ſhould: but it is in our power to make a conſtant and continued progreſs in the kinds of theſe perfections; and thence ariſes our obligation to advance in the degrees as far as the ſum of our faculties, exerciſed and improved to the utmoſt, can carry us. Truth, juſtice, mercy, goodneſs, and holineſs are eſſentially and eternally the ſame in their own nature. And ſince God hath been pleaſed to create us in his own image, by enduing us with reaſon, and thereby making us capable of exerciſing theſe his own attributes, which in a lower degree he hath graciouſly communicated to us; ſo by our diligent improvement in them, by beholding, as in a glaſs, the glory of the Lord, we are renewed more intimately into that image; we attain to a nearer reſemblance of his divine nature. The rule is perfect, that ſcope might be given to the moſt exalted virtue; but the abſolute perfection of it unattainable, that "he that glorieth may glory in the Lord." Our condemnation will not lie in this, that we did not exactly tranſcribe the original; but that we did not make the copy ſo complete as was

was in our power. The beſt conviction and aſſurance then, that we can have of truly diſcharging our duty, is the evidence of this progreſs in our chriſtian courſe.

It is not uncommon indeed to hear ſome men expreſs themſelves in ſuch terms of indifference about their religious conduct, as if it were the leaſt concern they had in the world; to hear them make a jeſt of the high ſtrains of piety and goodneſs which they obſerve in others, and ludicrouſly, or rather profanely declare, they do not pretend to be ſuch ſaints; they ſhould be content with the loweſt place in heaven. Happy, no doubt, will he be, who, by a faithful diſcharge of his duty to the utmoſt of his power, ſhall obtain a place in the loweſt of the heavenly manſions: but for men, with an air of preſumption, to pretend to cut out for themſelves juſt ſuch a portion of duty as they think will entitle them to an ineſtimable reward; and, like wary dealers, put themſelves to no more expence than what they judge will be barely neceſſary to purchaſe that pearl to which the kingdom of heaven is compared: this is a covetouſneſs which is idolatry: it is ſacrificing the riches of God's

God's goodneſs, their natural and ſpiritual powers, to their own indolence and wantonneſs. Had he, to whom were committed five talents in the parable, gained no more than he to whom two only were committed, can we think he would have merited the title of "a good and faithful ſervant?" No, of "a wicked and ſlothful ſervant;" ſlothful, in not making the moſt of them; wicked, in reſolving not to make the moſt of them. In ſhort, they who are bleſſed with the higheſt powers, whether intellectual, moral, or ſpiritual, are under a ſtrict obligation to employ them in all the offices of goodneſs, and in degrees proportionable to thoſe powers. The command given by St. Paul to Timothy, concerning thoſe who have worldly riches, virtually extends to them; and under the ſame penalty, the forfeiture of their ſalvation; "Charge them, that they be rich in good works."

If any man thinks himſelf already as virtuous and good as he needs to be; it is a certain ſign, he has not yet arrived at any eminence in virtue. For from thence, as from a riſing ground, the proſpect would enlarge upon him, and enable

enable him to descry vastly distant tracts, to which the small space that he had already measured bore no proportion. Few men will pretend to have made equal advances with St. Paul towards perfection; he being one of those persons, that, whatever they do, do it "with all their soul," and "with all their strength:" yet he was far from thinking that he had finished his work, or that he might remit any thing of his endeavours. On the contrary, we find him imitating the alacrity of those who run in a race; who do not so much consider what quantity of ground they have already cleared, as how much still remains, to call forth their strength and agility. "Not," says he, "as "though I had already attained, either "were already perfect: But I follow af- "ter, if that I may apprehend that for "which I also am apprehended of Christ "Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself "to have apprehended: But this one "thing I do; forgetting those things "which are behind, and reaching forth "unto those things which are before, I "press towards the mark," (or goal) "for the prize of the high calling of "God in Christ Jesus." And it is remarkable,

markable, that he urges the imitation of this his example, not only to thoſe of the Philippians, who were newly entered into the Chriſtian profeſſion, and conſequently can be ſuppoſed to have made but ſlender improvements in it; but, "Let us," ſays he, "as many as are perfect, be thus minded."

We ſee then how much it is the duty of the very beſt of us to be always improving in goodneſs: and we may venture to pronounce the ſtate of that man to be dangerous, and that he will never arrive at heaven, who ſits down, either under a lazy and affected deſpondency of being able to proceed no farther; or under a vain and impious preſumption of having already gone far enough.

A ſecond conſideration ariſes from the advantages we ſhall reap from the progreſſive ſtate. And here we may obſerve, that it will ſuperſede the truſt and confidence which too many are apt to repoſe in repentance: whereon, it is to be feared, a much greater ſtreſs is laid than it will be able to bear. No doubt can be made but chriſtians, by the help of a good education, and early impreſſions of religion upon their minds, may live free from

from the habits of all ſin, and from every ſuch ſingle act of it as is groſs and enormous. And after men have indulged themſelves in vicious liberties, with a view of making repentance their refuge; it may be queſtioned, whether the moſt ſincere repentance will not be ſuch as they may have reaſon to repent of. The wound in their conſcience may be healed in ſome ſort, but it will always reſemble the caſe of other wounds; where there is never ſuch an union and incorporation as there was in the original compoſition.

Now nothing will more effectually prevent any danger of this kind (and this is the leaſt danger that attends a reliance on repentance) than being actuated by thoſe more generous principles which accompany the progreſſive ſtate. If men form ſuch faint reſolutions of perſeverance in their duty, as to leave ſome ſecret reſerve for the admiſſion of ſin, it is more than probable they will ſoon have occaſion for ſuch an expedient: when our actions ſpring from mean motives, it is no wonder if they are confined within narrow limits, and conclude in inglorious atchievements. But when the fear of puniſhment

niſhment becomes but a ſubordinate incentive to moral attainments, and the love of virtue takes the lead in our inclinations; when our duty is not performed with the heartleſs thought of its being our duty, but when it becomes a free-will offering, and preſents itſelf as a kind of temptation to our deſires; when the pleaſure we have experienced from the progreſs we have made, adds life and vigour to our farther purſuits; when we are not driven forwards by the rebukes of an evil conſcience, but led on by the acclamation and applauſe of a good one; then will the ſoul be conſcious of her innate greatneſs and dignity, and we ſhall be ſo far from ſinking into the dregs of vice, that, as a philoſopher ſaid of his maſter, we ſhall almoſt bluſh to find ourſelves in the body.

And as the progreſſive ſtate is the beſt means for bringing us to a uniform and unreſerved obedience; ſo it is the beſt, if not the only ſecurity for our perſeverance in it. It is not allowed us, in this unſtable condition of things, to arrive at ſuch a ſituation as we may expect to enjoy without any farther care or concern. Like an arrow

row ſhot up into the air, if we do not continue to aſcend higher in the ſcale of moral and religious duties, we ſhall ſoon deſcend to ſomething below them. The mind then is to be kept continually upon the ſtretch, our attention excited, and our affections enlivened by divine contemplations; our reſolutions enforced by the view of higher advantages, our good habits farther ſtrengthened and confirmed by the frequent exerciſe of good actions. We are, as it were, ſailing againſt the wind; and if we remit any thing of our ſtrength or activity, ſo as not to proceed, we muſt of courſe be driven back. The faculties of the mind, as well as the members of the body, by frequent uſe, gain a kind of mechanic eaſe and readineſs; and by remiſſion and diſuſe, abate of their ſkill and aptneſs in the performance. By intermitting our converſe with things of a ſpiritual nature, we loſe our taſte and reliſh for them; a ſort of indiſpoſition is bred in the ſoul, the parent of a vitiated and depraved appetite. And hence it comes to paſs, that the lives of moſt men take their turns, like the ſea, of an alternate ebbing and flowing; whereas they ought to reſemble the courſe of a river,

which is receiving perpetual ſupplies: which at the ſame time that they augment its ſtreams, add weight to its flow, till it finally terminates in the ocean. Our virtue ſhould not be like a meteor, which appeareth for a very little time and then vaniſheth, but like the ſhining light which ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day.

If we are perſuaded of the truth of the doctrine that has been advanced, what ſhall we think of the ſtate of thoſe men, who are purſuing a courſe of life in direct oppoſition to it; who inſtead of daily proceeding in all virtue and godlineſs, are daily adding to the number and malignity of their ſins? What can we think indeed, but that it "had been better for "them not to have known the way of "righteouſneſs, than after they have "known it, to turn from the holy com-"mandment delivered unto them." Let their danger ſuggeſt to us the means of our own ſecurity: and let us not entertain a mean opinion of the power which chriſtianity has to reform the world, from the ſmall effects that we find it has on the minds of but too many. Let us conſider what our religion can do by what we know

know in fact it has done. It was the high commendation of an exemplary Roman, that while he lived in the very dregs and corruption of his own republic, he formed his manners by the model of one that was accounted the moſt perfect: let it be ours to keep continually in our eye the pattern which the primitive chriſtians have left us; and by copying after it, approve ourſelves blameleſs and harmleſs, "the Sons of God without rebuke in the "midſt of a perverſe generation, among "whom let us ſhine as lights in the world."

To conclude; Since it has pleaſed our Creator to conſtitute our frame in ſuch a manner, that we advance gradually to the perfect uſe of reaſon: a faculty whoſe increaſe we are for a long time as inſenſible of, as we are of the increaſe of our ſtature; we may from hence deduce a good argument to perſuade us, that the ſoul in a future ſtate will not ſtop ſhort at any certain period of happineſs; but that ſhe will continually enlarge her intellectual powers, and augment her capacities; purify her deſires, and inflame her affections; receive new acceſſions of bliſs and glory, and thereby make perpetual approaches to-

wards the fountain of all perfection. In this, we may well preſume, will conſiſt the happineſs of thoſe faithful ſervants, who ſhall be found to have done their maſter's will here on earth. And a more pleaſing conſideration cannot offer itſelf to the mind of man. Ought we not therefore to conclude, that during the intermediate interval, in order to render the whole of our exiſtence uniform, the ſoul, by parity of reaſon, ſhould preſerve the ſame tenor of improvement? Let us then conſider how far we are advanced in the path of life, and how far we have made it the path of the juſt. Let us endeavour to preſerve ſuch an uniform obedience in our lives, that they may know no variety but in their increaſe towards perfection: and as we are daily growing nearer to eternity, God grant that we may be more and more prepared for a bleſſed eternity!

SER-

SERMON XIV.

RELIGION THE ONLY TRUE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS.

PSALM IV. 6.

There be many that ſay, Who will ſhew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

HOW widely ſoever men differ in other things, yet in this it is manifeſt they all agree, that true happineſs is their ultimate end. Learned and ignorant, wiſe men and fooliſh, the righteous and the wicked, do all conſent in this

 point;

point; and the only difference between them lies, in determining wherein their true happineſs conſiſts, and by what methods it may beſt be attained. As many as make a right judgment in this matter, and act accordingly in the whole courſe of their lives; theſe are wiſe and good, rational and virtuous men: they on the contrary, who place their happineſs in a wrong object, or purſue it by improper and unrighteous means, are ignorant and wicked. Yet nevertheleſs all men equally intend to purſue their own happineſs; and even they who make themſelves the moſt extremely miſerable by the greateſt follies and moſt deſtructive vices, even theſe are ſtill ſeduced into it by ſome falſe pretence, and ſome appearance of happineſs: only this their error proceeds from their own negligence or wilfulneſs; they are what our Saviour calls fools and blind; and that makes them altogether inexcuſable. Daily experience ſhows, how inſatiably ambitious men purſue after honour; and frequently ſacrifice all ſenſe of virtue, and the ſatisfaction of a good conſcience, for the attainment of a vain imaginary greatneſs: likewiſe how unreaſonably covetous and oppreſſive

oppreſſive men, ſuffer fatigue of body, and uneaſineſs of mind, in the unrighteous purſuit of what they hardly ever enjoy: and how abſurdly the voluptuous deſtroy themſelves in following after pleaſure; and for momentary gratifications of brutal folly, bring upon themſelves frequently the acuteſt pains of body, and the much more intolerable burden of a tormented mind. On the other ſide, dying men, who look back with an unprejudiced eye on all theſe ſhort-lived vanities, and who are now drawing near to that unchangeable period, which is to fix their condition in the world to come; how meanly, how contemptibly do they always think, of all the ſinful, nay even innocent enjoyments of this preſent world! And what a great, what a juſt concern are they under, in reſpect of their future ſtate, that is, in reſpect of that ſtate, wherein now their only hope of happineſs remains! And not with regard to eternity only, but even in this preſent life itſelf, true religion is ſo far from diſcouraging men in their ſearch after happineſs, that it forbids not the enjoyment of any one temporal bleſſing which God has created for the uſe of man, but only

thoſe diſorderly actions, or unreaſonable exceſſes, by which fooliſh men make both themſelves and others miſerable. Thus ſelf-evident it is, that all men are neceſſarily by the very direction of their nature employed in the purſuit after happineſs; There be many that ſay; that is, all men naturally inquire, who will ſhew us any good?

Wicked and corrupt men ſeek this happineſs in the ſinful enjoyments of the preſent life; and their chooſing ſo to do, is their great error and folly. That too great a part of men, are like the beaſts that periſh, wholly intent upon the ſenſual enjoyments of this preſent life; without any regard to the dictates of reaſon, or the obligations of religion; and that they have very little and ſlight concern for what is to come hereafter; is too evident to be denied. But then it is alſo no leſs evident to any one who conſiders the true nature and final iſſue of things, that ſuch perſons act to the higheſt degree irrationally and unwiſely; and that the things, by the enjoyment of which they propoſe to be happy, are by no means ſufficient to that end. The enjoyments of this preſent world are ranked by St. John

John under theſe three heads, "the luſt "of the fleſh, the luſt of the eyes, and "the pride of life;" that is, pleaſure, riches, and honour. Theſe are, as the Apoſtle there ſtiles them, all that is in the world, that is, all the happineſs that this preſent world can afford. But now every one of theſe in particular, even where the enjoyment of them is innocent, much more when the ſting of ſin is annexed, has a great mixture of evil attending it, has at beſt much emptineſs and imperfection in it, has much unſatisfactorineſs and diſappointment going along with it: and all of them taken together, are far from being able to make a man truly happy, becauſe they ſtill want the two principal and moſt neceſſary qualifications of happineſs, that is, perfection of degree, and continuance in duration; they are not at beſt complete enough to ſatisfy the mind of man; and, if they were, yet they cannot continue long enough to maintain and preſerve its happineſs.

To inſtance in pleaſure, that great idol of mankind; for the ſake of which, all other things are deſired; and which alone has the greateſt pretence to make

men happy; this itſelf, is of all other things the moſt imperfect and diſappointing, and has the moſt evil mixed with it and conſequent upon it. By pleaſure, I would here be underſtood to mean, ſenſual pleaſure; that is, ſuch as vicious and debauched perſons call by that name; ſenſual pleaſure, or voluptuouſneſs, as it is oppoſed to the rational and temperate enjoyments of a virtuous man and a good chriſtian. For otherwiſe, pleaſure in general, as it is the enjoyment of good, and the deſire of pleaſure as it ſignifies the love of ourſelves and the ſeeking our own happineſs, is one of the firſt and moſt natural principles implanted in mankind, which neither ought nor can be laid aſide by any man: and this very principle itſelf affords an undeniable argument, why men ought willingly to part with the ſhort and unreaſonable pleaſures of ſin, for the unchangeable and eternal happineſs of heaven. When therefore we affirm that pleaſure is entirely inſufficient to make any perſon truly happy, we are always to underſtand ſuch ſenſual pleaſure, as vicious and debauched men fix their thoughts upon, in oppoſition to the wiſe and rational pleaſures

ſures of temperance and religion. Now, that pleaſure, in this ſenſe, is very far from making men happy, is evident both from experience and from the reaſon of things. For no men plainly are ſo extremely miſerable, as thoſe who thus pretend to be the greateſt voluptuaries. They toil and labour for that which is not, and are frequently diſappointed of what they moſt deſire, and undergo perpetual uneaſineſs both of body and mind, and endure much labour for momentary pleaſures; for pleaſures which themſelves are nothing but diſappointment at the beſt, far ſhort of what their vain imaginations repreſented, and are allayed with innumerable mixtures of pain and trouble, and end in ſorrow and deluſion, and leave behind them nothing but remorſe and repentance: and how can ſuch perſons as theſe eſteem themſelves happy?

Riches, the next object wherein corrupt minds uſually place their happineſs, are no leſs inſufficient to that end, than ſenſual pleaſure. In the hands of generous and worthy men, of charitable and pious chriſtians, they may indeed become inſtruments of great benefit, occaſions of much advantage to religion, and means of

of true happineſs. But to make a vicious man happy, a man whoſe happineſs is not founded in God and religion, they are altogether ineffectual. For, beſides the uncertainty of the things themſelves, that "riches often make themſelves wings and fly away;" they are moreover, as Solomon wiſely obſerves, "often kept by the owners thereof to their hurt;" to ſerve the ends of oppreſſion, unrighteouſneſs, and debauchery.

Laſtly; Honour, that great hope and aim of the ambitious, is neither a real good, nor can it be called our own. The virtues for which a worthy man is honoured, are far more valuable than the honour which the world pays to his worth; and theſe virtues can alone remain with him, when perhaps that honour and eſteem may be turned into reproach. For in this erroneous world, men are frequently honoured for what is truly diſhonourable, and ſometimes they are calumniated for that which really deſerves the higheſt praiſes. Now it is evident that one man cannot be made truly happy or unhappy, by another's falſe and miſtaken opinion: for this were to make the happineſs of the beſt and wiſeſt men, depend

depend upon the weak and falſe imaginations of the moſt ignorant and fooliſh. The honour therefore and applauſe of a deceitful world, cannot really make a man happy, nor the want of it be the cauſe of a wiſe man's miſery.

Add to all this, that beſides the peculiar inſufficiency of every one of theſe objects, pleaſure, riches and honour, each conſidered in themſelves; they are moreover each of them deſtroyed, as to their power of making men happy, by the want of either or both of the other. Nay, ſuppoſing a man to enjoy every one and all of them together, in the greateſt fulneſs and affluence imaginable; yet even ſtill they would want the two principal and moſt neceſſary qualifications requiſite to make a man truly happy; namely, perfection in degree, and continuance of duration. They cannot at beſt compleat the ſatisfaction of the mind; and if they were able to do this, yet they could not continue long enough to maintain and preſerve it. Whatever will make the mind of man happy, muſt be able to ſatisfy it both in its whole capacity and in its whole duration; and whatever is not ſufficient to effect this,

this, cannot be our chief and final happineſs. Now all thoſe things wherein worldly and irreligious minds uſually place their happineſs, are at beſt greatly deficient in theſe two reſpects.

They cannot make us happy in the whole, nor in the beſt part of our capacity. Man conſiſts of a ſenſitive body and of a rational ſoul, and it is either neceſſary to his well-being that he be happy in both theſe parts; or, if he may poſſibly be happy by the ſatisfaction of a virtuous mind without any ſenſual and bodily pleaſures; yet it is very evident he cannot on the other ſide, be made happy by the pleaſures of the body only, without the ſatisfaction of a virtuous mind. The capacity of man's mind is great; and its deſires and expectations, its hopes and fears are boundleſs: and it is well known by experience, that all the enjoyments of the preſent life, without virtue and true religion, can by no means either ſatisfy its deſires and expectations, or prevent its fears and diſcontents. Theſe things therefore, are greatly inſufficient to make a man truly happy, ſince they cannot make

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him ſo in the beſt and principal part of his being.

But ſuppoſing they were able to ſatisfy the whole capacity of a man's mind, yet they could not make him happy for the whole, nor for the greateſt part of his duration. Dying men are always ſufficiently ſenſible of this; and living men, if they were wiſe, would ſee and underſtand this moſt important truth, before their eyes were too late opened by the extremity of that laſt neceſſity. Nothing can be more evident than that eternity bears no proportion to time; and nothing can be plainer, than that theſe things which men dote upon now in the preſent time, will do them no ſervice in the ages of eternity: why then will they not ſee, that theſe things are not their true and proper happineſs? But all wicked and debauched perſons are infatuated and blinded, and will place their happineſs in that which profiteth not. This therefore their opinion is their folly, and if they live according to it, muſt be their deſtruction.

On the contrary, virtuous men place their chief happineſs in the knowledge and favour of God; in the practice of virtue

virtue and true religion; and their acting according to this principle, is the greateſt and indeed the only true wiſdom: "there "be many that ſay, who will ſhew us a- "ny good? Lord, lift thou up the light "of thy countenance upon us." For the clearer explication of which propoſition, I ſhall endeavour briefly to ſet forth, wherein this true happineſs conſiſts; and in what reſpects it excels the happineſs of ſenſual and corrupt minds.

The firſt part of the happineſs of good men conſiſts in their contemplating with delight, and meditating with pleaſure, on the perfections of God the ſupreme good. Theſe perfections are manifeſted in the works, and in the laws of God; and good men according to their ſeveral capacities, contemplate with pleaſure, and meditate with delight, upon the ſeveral manifeſtations of theſe divine perfections. Virtuous minds, even of the meaneſt capacities, ſee enough in the moſt obvious and ſuperficial view of the Divine works, to excite in them a deep ſenſe and admiration of the almighty power, the unſearchable wiſdom, and the eternal providence of God; and they ſee enough in the firſt and moſt eaſy repreſentation of his laws,

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to fill their thoughts with the moſt awful fear of his juſtice, and with the moſt ardent love of his abundant goodneſs. But good men of larger capacities and greater advantages, ſee yet further into the wiſdom of the works and of the laws of God: the contemplation therefore of theſe things, affords a great and ſolid ſatisfaction to virtuous and religious minds; and this ſatisfaction will grow up with the improvements of their knowledge and virtue here, to a perfect and unſpeakable happineſs in the enjoyments of the world to come.

The next part of the happineſs of virtuous and good men, is the ſenſe of God's preſent favour to them, ariſing from the conſciouſneſs of their conformity to his holy and divine will. They know both from their natural idea of God, and from the revealed declarations of his will, that the light of his countenance is, as the text expreſſes it, lift up upon the righteous, that is, that his favour and protection always accompanies righteous and juſt men; and by the teſtimony of their own conſcience, compared with the written word of God, they know and humbly rejoice that they themſelves

ſelves are in ſome meaſure ſuch. The favour therefore that God bears to virtuous and good men, they find belongs to themſelves; and this affords them at all times and in all caſes, a ſolid and rational ſatisfaction. There is a careleſs eaſe which ariſes from error, and there is a deluſive pleaſure which ariſes from wickedneſs; but both theſe ſatisfactions are ſhort and inconſtant; and they lead to folly, and terminate in miſery. But this happineſs of virtuous and religious minds, which ariſes from the practice of virtue and from the favour of God, is as certain and conſtant as the nature and conſtitution of things, as the truth and veracity of God; and cannot be taken from them, even by perſecution itſelf.

Finally; This happineſs of righteous and good men is completed and perfected, by the expectation of eternal rewards, with which hope they are ſupported here; and by the actual poſſeſſion of them, which they ſhall enjoy hereafter. This is a happineſs equal to the deſires and hopes of an immortal ſoul; a happineſs, worthy of God to give, and adequate to the capacity of an immortal ſpirit to deſire. In this ſtate, all the deſires and expectations

expectations of the ſoul will be turned into fruition; and all its hopes will be ſwallowed up in the real enjoyment of inexpreſſible felicity. In a word, all its faculties and capacities will here be ſatisfied, and that ſatisfaction will live and continue, as long as the immortal ſoul itſelf.

Having thus briefly deſcribed, what the happineſs of righteous and good men is; I preſume we need not to enter into a particular compariſon of it with the happineſs of vicious and corrupt minds, to ſhow in what reſpects it is ſuperior to theirs; and to demonſtrate that to prefer this ſolid and ſubſtantial happineſs, before the empty and deceitful pleaſures of ſin, is the greateſt and indeed the only true wiſdom. I ſhall only obſerve in a word, that this happineſs, which is the reward of virtue, exceeds all other pleaſures infinitely, in the two forementioned eſſential qualifications of happineſs; perfection in degree, and continuance of duration. The Pſalmiſt thus deſcribes them both: "In thy preſence is "fulneſs of joy, and at thy right hand "are pleaſures for evermore."

The application, wherewith I ſhall conclude

conclude, ſhall be this only: that from what has been ſaid, there ariſes matter of great comfort to virtuous and good men at all times, but eſpecially at the hour of death. Vicious minds place their happineſs in the enjoyment of the pleaſures of this ſinful world; and when this world comes to an end, as it does to every man at the concluſion of his own life; where then will their happineſs be? But he that places his happineſs in the knowledge, and love, and imitation of God, in following the dictates of reaſon and true religion, here; ſhall enjoy it alſo in theſe things hereafter; for God, and his perfections, continue for ever. And when the righteous ſhall ſhine forth in that day, as the ſun in the kingdom of their Father; then ſhall the wicked be ſenſible of their own folly, and ſhall cry out, as it is moſt elegantly expreſſed in the book of Wiſdom: "We fools accounted his life madneſs, and his end "to be without honour; how is he numbered among the children of God, and "his lot is among the ſaints!"

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SERMON XV.

ON DILIGENCE.

ROMANS XII. 11.

Not ſlothful in buſineſs.

EVERY man has two general concerns upon his hands of great weight and importance, anſwerable to the two kinds of exiſtence through which he is to paſs; namely, the preſent life, and that which is to come: for both which it is incumbent on him to make ſuitable proviſion. The one is indeed of

of much greater importance than the other, and therefore merits a proportionable ſhare of his endeavours. The happineſs of the next life, or the buſineſs of eternity, is of infinite conſequence, and requires our utmoſt diligence and care. Nevertheleſs the concerns of this world are by no means to be neglected. A due attendance upon theſe is not inconſiſtent with the proſecution of the other; but, on the contrary, tends to further and promote it. Worldly induſtry, under proper reſtraints and regulations, is a great friend to religion and virtue; as I ſhall have occaſion to obſerve more at large in the progreſs of this diſcourſe. For which reaſon it cannot be a ſubject unworthy of our conſideration. And indeed the caution in the text relates wholly to it. The meaning of which is, that men muſt, by no means, give themſelves up to idleneſs or ſloth; but muſt diligently purſue their reſpective vocations, and be induſtrious in that ſtate of life to which it has pleaſed God to call them.

I ſhall not offer upon this ſubject, to mark out the bounds and limits of induſtry, or to ſhew preciſely to what meaſure and

and degree men are to be diligent in their ſeveral ways of life. That is not perhaps poſſible to be done, conſidering men's different circumſtances and conditions, which require different degrees of induſtry and labour. Some are obliged to take more pains, and to be more laborious than others; whoſe condition of life exempts them from ſo great a degree of toil, by making it neither neceſſary nor expedient. However idleneſs is the privilege of none: it is criminal in all, and prejudicial to all in many reſpects. But of this more hereafter. In the mean time it muſt be obſerved that worldly induſtry is capable of being carried to exceſs, not only as it may become detrimental to health, which is comparatively but a ſmall conſideration; but as it may entrench upon the concerns of the other life: which being as I took notice before, of far the greateſt moment, muſt in no wiſe be broken in upon by any concerns belonging to this.

Thus then our application to worldly buſineſs muſt be limited and confined. We muſt make our ſpiritual calling and election ſure, whatever become of our temporal callings. But to ſhew more

particularly how far men ought to be diligent and induſtrious in their reſpective employments, is neither poſſible nor needful. Every one may know how to apply the general precept to his own caſe and circumſtances. If a man is but convinced, that he ought to be induſtrious, and is thereupon reſolved ſo to be, he will diſcover readily enough how to proportion his induſtry to his condition and ſtate of life. I ſhall content myſelf therefore with endeavouring to perſuade men to comply in general with the caution in the text, by ſhewing the neceſſity of induſtry, and the ſeveral advantages which belong to it.

In order to which it muſt be conſidered, that the world cannot ſubſiſt without labour and pains. Some indeed may be excuſed, and ever will be exempted from the drudging part of buſineſs: but ſtill even theſe cannot be wholly idle and unemployed without damage to the public, as well as diſadvantage to themſelves. However the generality of mankind muſt labour. The neceſſities of life require a great deal of pains, and the comforts and conveniences of it require much more. God could indeed, if he had ſo pleaſed, have

have maintained the world without men's labour: he could have made such provision for them, as would have supplied all their wants, and furnished all their occasions, without any contribution of their endeavours. The earth might have been made to have yielded its increase of its own accord, and have poured out its fruits without any human care or cultivation. Every climate might have abounded with whatever could be desired for use or ornament, without any dependance on others. In a word, nature might have been made so rich and fruitful in every respect, as to have rendered art useless, and labour superfluous. But Providence was pleased to order matters otherwise; and we may be sure upon very weighty and important accounts: as will more fully appear if we proceed to consider the advantages of industry, and the danger and disadvantage of being "slothful in business."

I shall begin with those temporal advantages which flow from industry, and then proceed to shew the good influence which it has upon our spiritual interest. To justify my insisting on the former of these, I desire it may be considered, that

in ſcripture we meet with frequent recommendations of induſtry drawn from this very topic. Particularly by the wiſe man, who dwells much upon it. We may take notice then in the firſt place, how much the public is indebted to induſtry and diligence. To this are owing the birth and improvement of arts and ſciences, which contribute ſo much both to the uſe and embelliſhment of life, and ſerve to lift men up ſo much above inferior ranks of creatures. Accordingly thoſe nations which have made but little progreſs therein, are found to be barbarous and uncivilized: the countries wild and deſolate, and the men ſavages. Great and numberleſs are the advantages, which men derive from arts and ſciences, and conſequently from induſtry, by which they are both begun and carried on. An induſtrious people may not indeed always proſper and flouriſh, becauſe they may lie under the diſadvantage of an unhappy government, or other inconveniences, which may keep them low, and diſappoint their diligence. But there cannot be a flouriſhing people without induſtry, whatever other advantages they may be poſſeſſed of. For, without this the benefits

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of nature must be, in a great measure, lost, and the blessings of Providence thrown away. There are flourishing nations in the world, that wholly owe their power and prosperity, next to the blessing of Heaven, to their being remarkably industrious, which has raised and advanced them, in spite of many great obstacles and discouraging difficulties that stood in their way. And there are other nations, which notwithstanding many and great natural advantages, have never distinguished themselves for want of taking the pains necessary thereto. Their sloth has kept them down, and buried them in obscurity. Or perhaps they have become a prey to other more active nations, and been spoiled of their riches, as well as deprived of their liberty. Those natural blessings which they suffer to lie unimproved, have tempted others to invade and over-run their country. And thus they have fallen a public sacrifice to their own sloth and inactivity. As liberty is a great promoter and encourager of industry, so industry is the best guard to liberty. Strength and power avail nothing, if they be not exerted; and exerted they cannot be to advantage, without pains and industry. Thus sloth

naturally tends to ſlavery, as well as poverty. Nor is it any wonder that Providence ſhould frequently ſuffer thoſe hands to be tied, which would not work when they were at liberty. An induſtrious people have the beſt title to the protection of Heaven, whilſt the lazy are left deſtitute, and abandoned to the ill effects of their own ſluggiſhneſs. "The hand of the diligent ſhall bear rule," ſays the wiſe man, "but the ſlothful ſhall be under tribute."

Having thus briefly touched upon the advantages of induſtry with relation to the public, I ſhall now conſider the temporal advantages which accrue from it to particular perſons. The tendency which it has to raiſe men in the world is ſo clear and manifeſt, that it is needleſs to inſiſt upon it. Ordinarily ſpeaking, it is the only way to wealth, which cannot be acquired without it. Men indeed may inherit riches, and be wealthy that way without pains. But even then without induſtry they cannot improve them, nor perhaps keep what they have. And beſides, idleneſs naturally brings them into ſuch courſes as tend to waſte their fortunes, and reduce them to want. And

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as to thoſe who have their fortunes to make, they muſt neceſſarily take pains. They may as well pretend to be wiſe without inſtruction, as rich without diligence. If a man's condition be very low, he muſt labour for a ſubſiſtence. And if it be moderate, he muſt be induſtrious, if he will advance it. This is too evident to need a proof. He muſt needs "become poor that dealeth with a ſlack hand," according to Solomon's obſervation, "but the hand of the diligent maketh rich." And as men thus get by being diligent, ſo they thrive in a double reſpect. The ſame royal author tells us, that "the ſubſtance of a diligent man is precious." His diligence firſt brings him in gain, and then contributes to ſecure it when it is got. He whoſe wealth is of his own acquiring, is likelieſt to underſtand the value of it. He knows how he got it, and will therefore know how he ſpends it. Thus his ſubſtance will wear well, and make a better proof upon this account. Beſides, the bleſſing of Heaven goes along with his labours, and proſpers his endeavours. What is got by honeſt induſtry, has the protection of Providence for its ſecurity. And

this matter has confirmation from the mouth of the ſame author; "Wealth "gotten by vanity ſhall be diminiſhed; "but he that gathereth by labour ſhall "increaſe." Honour likewiſe, as well as wealth, muſt be obtained by theſe means. Induſtry is the high road to preferment, which, ordinarily ſpeaking, cannot be arrived at any other way. "Seeſt thou," ſays the ſame wiſe prince, "a man diligent in his buſineſs, he ſhall "ſtand before kings, he ſhall not ſtand "before mean men."

As induſtry makes men proſper in the world, and advances their conditions, ſo perhaps it might not be improper to add, that it contributes to the preſervation of health. Human bodies are framed after ſuch a manner, as to ſtand in conſtant need of exerciſe. And no doubt this was contrived ſo by Providence, on purpoſe to keep them in employment. We may look upon it as a natural check upon ſloth, and a kind of ſecurity to the purſuit of buſineſs, that no motive whatſoever might be wanting to ſpur man on to that labour and induſtry for which he was deſigned. There is no doubt but buſineſs may be immoderately followed, and

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that a man may be ſometimes too induſtrious, and thereby prejudice himſelf in this reſpect. And ſo may any virtue run into an extreme, and there loſe itſelf. This is no diſparagement to induſtry, when governed by the rules of diſcretion. Moderate labour is nevertheleſs beneficial, or rather neceſſary. Thoſe who are ſkilled in the nature of human bodies do aſſign reaſons for it, and ſhew how it comes to paſs. It is univerſally confeſſed, that ſloth is an enemy to health, and moderate labour or exerciſe very advantageous. And this truth is abundantly confirmed by experience. Long life being moſt frequently to be found among the laborious part of mankind. Accordingly it is obſervable, that they who decline buſineſs, do nevertheleſs follow it, as it were under diſguiſe. They ſometimes labour, and take as much pains in the purſuit of diverſions, as others do about the moſt weighty employments. And was not health ſupported by this expedient, every man would be forced to ſubmit to buſineſs, or he muſt cut ſhort the thread of his life. In ſhort, idleneſs may be looked upon as a dead weight upon a man's conſtitution. It fills him full of

infirmities, and naturally tends to ſhorten his days. As if nature had intended, that he who was reſolved to do but little good in the world, ſhould not ſtay long in it, but ſhould be cut off as an unprofitable member, and a nuiſance to ſociety. From what has been ſaid it appears, that we may properly enough ſay of induſtry, what the wiſe man ſays of wiſdom, "length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour."

We may conſider, in the next place, the pleaſure and ſatisfaction which redounds from the purſuit of any honeſt employment. As to which it muſt be granted, that men's inclinations do not always lead them to buſineſs; but then it is becauſe they are depraved. A wicked man thinks virtue unpleaſant: ſo likewiſe a vitiated palate can reliſh nothing that is wholeſome. In like manner where idleneſs has got poſſeſſion, buſineſs becomes a grievance. But ſtill in itſelf it is valuable in this reſpect. Cuſtom indeed bears a great ſway in this, as in all other caſes. Thoſe who have inured themſelves to buſineſs and employment, do very often like it ſo well, that they know not how to live without it. It muſt

muſt undoubtedly therefore be pleaſant to them. Perhaps it is gain which greatly contributes to make it ſo. Let what will make it ſo, if the motive be honeſt, no objection can be drawn from thence. Lawful gain may certainly be lawfully followed. But doubtleſs a man may take a pleaſure in being induſtrious, and minding his buſineſs, upon further views than barely the love of gain. His very employment may be pleaſing and delightful to him, taken abſtractedly from other conſiderations. However, he may find great ſatisfaction in induſtry, as it is a part of his duty, as it is pleaſing and acceptable in the ſight of God, as it enables him to do good in his generation, and more particularly to "provide for his own houſhold," which whoſoever neglects, is, as the Apoſtle declares, "worſe than an infidel." Not to mention his having an eye upon thoſe ſpiritual advantages, which I have not yet conſidered. So that a man may take pleaſure in buſineſs, both upon its own account, and for the ſake of thoſe many advantages which attend it. If it be ſaid, that hard labour is troubleſome and painful; yet nevertheleſs cuſtom will, in a great meaſure,

render it otherwiſe. However, there are two things to be duly conſidered: the one is, that hard labour, whatever it be in itſelf, is much pleaſanter than conſtant idleneſs. Doing nothing is certainly the hardeſt labour that man can undergo. It is the moſt reſtleſs and uneaſy ſtate imaginable. And ſo it may well be, becauſe it is repugnant to the nature of man's mind, the very eſſence of which is action. When a man has no employment for his thoughts, they are apt to work inwards, and prey upon themſelves. A ſlothful man's time is a greater burthen to him, than a laborious man's work. The latter knows how to diſpatch the one; but the former knows not how to get rid of the other. It ſtill hangs upon his hands, and perpetually troubles and torments him. As reſt gives refreſhment to a laborious man; ſo an idle man can find no eaſe till he takes up ſome buſineſs or employment. Which brings me to the other thing to be conſidered; namely, that as hard labour is better than idleneſs; ſo it greatly recommends reſt to a man, and gives him a true reliſh of it. The ſlothful man is glutted and ſurfeited with his eaſe; but that leiſure, which the induſ-

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trious man finds in his intermiſſions from buſineſs, is truly delightful to him. Labour indeed and reſt do mutually recommend each other; not only for the pleaſure of variety, but as the ſucceſſion is agreeable to nature. When a man is wearied with toil and buſineſs, his ſpirits are ſunk, and he finds and feels he wants reſt. Upon this account it is welcome when it arrives. So likewiſe when he is refreſhed, and his ſtrength and vigour return, his appetite for buſineſs returns along with them; and he goes to his work with the ſame alacrity that he came from it. This is nothing but what is natural, and for that reaſon muſt be pleaſant to all, but ſuch as are beſotted with ſloth. It appears from hence, as if Providence deſigned men the true enjoyment of no bleſſings whatſoever, without the price of labour. Since even reſt has a natural kind of tax ſet upon it. Though a man may get reſt, without antecedent labour, yet it is then of no value, nor will it do him any good. If he intends to enjoy it, he muſt take ſome pains before-hand. As a man muſt faſt a convenient time, if he will have an appetite to his food; ſo he muſt employ himſelf ſome way or other,

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were it for nothing but to get an appetite to reſt. Eaſe to the laborious man, is as grateful as food to the hungry; but to the idle man, it is like feeding upon a full ſtomach.

Induſtry is moreover of great importance as it makes men uſeful members of a commonwealth, and enables them to do much good in a private capacity, to their neighbours, friends, and relations. It puts it into their power to exerciſe acts of charity, relieve the needy, and ſuccour thoſe in diſtreſs. Thus when the Apoſtle enjoins labour, and requires men to "work with their hands the thing which is good," one end which he has in view is, "that they may have to give to him that needeth." But the greateſt advantage of induſtry is, that it contributes ſo greatly to the preſervation of innocence, by ſecuring men from the ill effects of ſloth. Idleneſs is the great inlet to licentiouſneſs, and tends to all manner of vice and immorality. It corrupts the principles of religion, and opens a door to all kinds of ſin and wickedneſs. There is but a ſhort ſtep from doing nothing to doing miſchief. The mind of man will not ſleep; but his thoughts and his paſſi-

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ons will drive at ſomething. He is prone to evil, and will naturally run into it, if due employments be wanting to correct the biaſs. When men have nothing to do, they ſoon grow ſick of their own company. The entertainments of learning, of nature, of reaſon, are not agreeable to the bulk of mankind, who have neither capacity nor reliſh for things of this kind. Idleneſs therefore gives full ſcope to all ſorts of temptations, againſt which the mind is utterly unguarded. It draws men into ill company, and expoſes them to the infection of all thoſe vices, which are there to be met with. In a word, men hereby lie open to all the ſolicitations of ſin, and the prevailing influence of ill examples.

It were well if the ill effects of idleneſs terminated in thoſe who were guilty of it, and reached no further. But as it diſhonours God, and is in every reſpect pernicious to a man's ſelf; ſo it has a great tendency to make him tranſgreſs againſt his neighbour. And thus it becomes, in a new reſpect, prejudicial to the public. As an idle perſon is peculiarly liable to the contagion of other men's vices, ſo others are in danger of being affected

affected by his idleneſs. It is his cuſtom to put a ſtop where he can to other men's buſineſs, as well as his own; as well to keep himſelf in countenance, as to encourage his beloved ſloth. It is natural for ſuch perſons to endeavour to get companions as idle as themſelves, and conſequently if they do not find them, to make them ſuch. This perhaps being the only inſtance of their taking pains. Thus other men are brought into a ſnare, and oftentimes ruined by theſe means. And thus likewiſe buſineſs is interrupted to the detriment of the public.

But further; Idleneſs, as was obſerved before, reduces men to want, and tends directly to poverty. If a man be low in the world, it will keep him ſo; and if he enjoy a fair fortune, idleneſs will find means to ſink it. And when he is brought to this paſs, he muſt neceſſarily either work, or do worſe: it is not likely that he will even then take up with working, as having been accuſtomed to idleneſs. And thus he naturally falls to ſtealing, as the likelieſt method to ſupply his wants, in an eaſy and cheap way. Hereby he thinks he can gratify his ſloth, and at the ſame time reap the fruits of other men's

men's labour. Thus we see idleness brings men into the most enormous crimes. And here again likewise the public suffers greatly by it. Could nothing more be said for industry, than that it tends to keep men just and honest, even this would surely be a character sufficient to recommend it. Could nothing more be said against idleness, than that it tends to theft, and all kinds of wrong and injustice, even this might well be thought enough to make men dread and detest it.

Lastly; Idleness tends to disturb the peace of society. Intermeddling in other men's concerns generally ends in difference and disagreement. It kindles contentions, and creates feuds and animosities. Now idleness is frequently at the bottom of this mischief. What contributes so much to make men meddle with the affairs of others, as neglecting their own? Did they mind their own business, they would have little leisure or inclination to intrude into other mens. And the more diligent they were at home, the less curious or busy they would be abroad. "We hear" says the Apostle, to the Thessalonians, "that there are some which "walk

" walk among you disorderly, working " not at all, but are busy bodies;" thereby plainly signifying the latter to be the effect of the former. " Now them, con- " tinues he, that are such, we command " and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, " that with quietness they work, and eat " their own bread." And it is certain, that industry is an excellent expedient for the maintenance of peace, and the preservation of love and unity. A diligent attendance upon men's callings and employments cuts off many opportunities of dissensions, and prevents those differences and ruptures, which are the natural consequences of idleness and sloth.

Thus we see how highly advantageous industry is to religion, by promoting many branches of men's duty; by securing their innocence in general, and keeping them out of many temptations, mischiefs, and snares, which they will otherwise unavoidably fall into. It is not indeed an absolute security. A man may take ill measures, follow bad courses, in an industrious way; but industry is not to be blamed for that. Besides, if an industrious man may, an idle man must go astray. There is this mighty difference between

between them, that whereas the one may be guilty, the other cannot be innocent.

To conclude; It behoves, however, the induſtrious to take care, that while they apply themſelves ſo diligently to the affairs of this world, they by no means neglect the more weighty concerns of the next: That they ſuffer not worldly buſineſs wholly to engroſs their thoughts and endeavours; leſt, while they are thus carefully employed about "things temporal, they finally loſe the things that "are eternal."

The END *of* VOL. VI.

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